Economies of Salvation: The Forms and Processes of William Langland's Theological Vision

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Abstract

This thesis argues that William Langland's *Piers Plowman* is an important contribution to the ways in which the late-medieval church discerned the development of doctrine. Langland's poetry is embedded in a maze of political, philosophical, economic, theological and linguistic crosscurrents of fourteenth-century England. Over the course of at least thirty years and three distinct versions, Langland's poem both engages and reacts to debates between John Wycliffe and Archbishop Arundel over English politics and the practice of vernacular theology. The poem itself becomes wrapped up in the rallying cries of John Ball and others during the Great Rising of 1381. It reflects keen attentiveness to the visceral exchanges between William of Ockham and Pope John XXIII over wealth, poverty and the church's witness, as it also displays enmeshment within philosophical debates between realists and nominalists of the fourteenth century. Langland's command of interconnected and shifting themes is matched only by the brilliance of his art. Specifically, a form of poetry that, as this thesis argues, is both distinctly capable of investigating the complex themes *Piers Plowman* examines and particularly fitting for the subject of its explorations.

Just as *Piers Plowman* proves capable of demonstrating the elasticity of language to stretch out towards the God who is ineffable, the poetry also portrays the consequences of that same language breaking, and folding back in upon itself. Langland presents practices, virtues, words, and characters whose meanings and identities are turned upside down and inside out to reweave the social fabric which makes up the body of Christ into a web of death-dealing machinations commanded by anti-Christ. Langland's contributions to church discernment of the development of doctrine are not merely noetic.

Rather, Langland's poetry offers a fierce argument in both form and content for how the church might learn to see itself, its Head, the space between, as well as the way to journey faithfully in the gap.

Statement of Copyright

Declaration

This work has been submitted to Durham University in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the Durham University or in any other university for a degree.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is born out of the generosity and expertise of many teachers and friends. As a young undergraduate at the University of Georgia, I was extremely fortunate to meet Frank Harrison. A Philosophy Professor and a 'practicing Episcopalian', he taught me to see Plato and Aristotle as invaluable conversation partners concerning some of my deepest questions about Christianity and life. His encouragement to further investigate my questions at Duke proved a gift for which I will ever be grateful. Duke was feast. Stanley Hauerwas embodied the kind of bridge between philosophy and Christian ethics Frank promised. And while teachers like Paul Griffiths and Reinhard Huetter introduced me to the rigor and depth of the Catholic tradition, David Aers simultaneously modeled a theological mind in relentless pursuit of a church *semper reformanda*. David introduced me to *Piers Plowman* and taught me to love Langland's poetry. My efforts to analyze this great poem simply would not be possible without him.

Transforming interest into scholarship is no small task. I am deeply grateful that Carol Harrison and Giles Gasper took on such a work by taking me on as a PhD student. Giles, in particular, saw this thesis from its very inception through to the end with unfailing patience, encouragement and expertise. Giles worked harder, and with more hope in me completing this thesis, than any student could ever ask from their supervisor. Giles introduced me to Elizabeth Powell in the project's final year. Her theological insights made the present work infinitely better. I continue to be grateful for all that I learned about theology and about teaching theology from Mark McIntosh and Lewis Ayers, whose presence in a classroom model their own commitment that, as Aquinas said, *ex modo loquendi datur nobis doctrina*. The entire department of Theology and

Religion was exceeding generous to me as I worked to bring this project to completion through the interruptions that came in the form of the births of our two sons as well as the coronavirus pandemic. To everyone at Abbey House, and St. John's College, I offer my most sincere thanks.

One's interest and scholarship must, I think, be oriented towards some *telos* beyond mere curiosity in order to be considered virtuous. Paul Murray and the Centre for Catholic studies (CCS) at the University of Durham embody such a commitment. I could not have taken on this work without the generous financial support of the CCS and the many ways in which the Centre creates an intellectual community blending the life of the mind and the life of the church. Joshua Furnal, Thomas Lynch, Charlie Shepherd, and Fr. Anthony Currer, all invited me into friendships that enriched and sustained me throughout this project, and for which I am deeply grateful.

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faith and life that I witness in our shared work offers a constant reminder of Langland's vision.

I am grateful to my parents for having the kindness and selflessness to encourage me along such a winding journey. To my wife, Pamela, this is no place for a love letter. Then, of course, love is not best written in letters, but through a life. For the life that you have so beautifully shared with me, with all its love, joy and wonder I am grateful beyond words. I love you. Thank you. And to my two sons, Hayes and Jack, I pray that your lives may be enriched with a similar abundance of friendships, generosity and goodwill. It is to you, my sons, and the great hope I have for both of you, that I dedicate this work.

Contents

Introduction

Theories of Representation and the Craft of Theology

nam uera religio, nisi credantur ea, quae quisque postea, si se bene gesserit dignus que fuerit, adsequatur atque percipiat, et omnino sine quodam graui auctoritatis imperio inire recte nullo pacto potest.[1]

– Augustine of Hippo*, De utilitate credendi*

Since, however, God has opened the way of eternal salvation solely to each person's individual faith, and demands from us that whoever wants to be saved must have a personal faith of their own, I resolved to rely on the faith or judgment of no one else as to the things of God, but rather to take religious belief from a faith based exclusively on divine revelation; [*I resolved*]*, omitting nothing which was my own responsibility, but perusing and perpending the scripture of God itself with the utmost diligence, to have every single point investigated and understood for myself, by my very own care* [cognitum].[2]

– John Milton*, De Doctrina Christiana*

This thesis examines specific scenes in which the poetic forms and dialectical processes constitutive of the theological vision(s) that develop through William Langland's *Piers Plowman* are on display.[3] It is worth noting at the outset what this focus

[1] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, ed. J. Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiarum Latinorum, 25 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), cap. 9, par. 21, linea 13, [There is no right way of entering into the true religion without believing things that all who live rightly and become worthy of it will understand and see for themselves later on, and without some submission to a certain weight of authority], English translation from Augustine, *On Christian Belief* trans. Ray Kearney, Boniface Ramesy, ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: New City Press, 2005), p. 133.

[2] John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana* in *The Complete Works of John Milton* ed. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5, lines 22-30.

[3] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text* ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008). All quotations of *Piers Plowman* unless otherwise stated are taken from Pearsall's edition and cited by Passus and line number. I have constantly consulted *Piers Plowman: The C Version; Will's Vision of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better, and Do-Best,* ed. George Russell and George Kane (London: Athlone, 1997). Modern English translations are provided in the footnotes, and unless otherwise stated are taken from George Economou *William Langland's Piers Plowman: The C-version* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). For the B-version of the poem I have referenced

does, and does not, include. The present study does not focus on anything like the 'theological vision of the historical figure William Langland', but rather upon the multiple voices and theological visions that are expressed, pitted against each other, dialectically engaged, surpassed and returned to through *Piers Plowman*. This is a theological engagement with the text of *Piers Plowman* that is informed by but not oriented towards making substantive conclusions concerning the historical identity and or dispositions of the author.[4] The overarching argument concerns the ways in which Langland's poem makes a contribution, in both form and content, to contemporary questions in late fourteenth-century England over the development of Christian doctrine, and pays particular attention to Langland's vision of the role of the church in the Christian life. Langland's poem provides a unique contribution to medieval debates concerned with negotiating rival claims to the unfolding of Christian identity and practice.

Embarking on such a task, David Benson's warning is apposite: 'Treating Langland as a theologian risks undervaluing him as a poet, we should pay more (or at least equal) attention to the poetic form in which these opinions are expressed'.[5] Benson is right. The theological genius of *Piers Plowman*'s art cannot be extracted from the minute details of its poetry. Thomas Aquinas insists a similar link between form and content in his commentary on the *Pater Noster, ex modo loquendi datur nobis doctrina*.[6]

Piers Plowman: The B Version, rev. ed., ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone, 1988).

[4] For a contrasting recent study see Robert Adams, *Langland and the Rokele Family: The Gentry Background to Piers Plowman* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013).

[5] David Benson, 'Salvation, Theology and Poetry in *Piers Plowman*', *English Language Notes,* 44 (2006): 103-107.

[6] Thomas Aquinas, *In Orationem Dominicam Videlicet 'Pater Noster' Expositio*, in *Opuscula Theologica*, ed. R.A. Verardo, R.M. Spiazzi, and M. Calcaterra, 2 vols. (Rome: Marietti, 1954) 2:228, [the teaching we receive comes from, or is bound up with, the mode in which we speak].

Whether in poetry, theology or art, the teaching we receive is inextricably bound up with the mode in which it is composed.[7] *Piers Plowman*'s theological visions are, as Elizabeth Salter suggested years ago, likewise indivisible from the forms of its composition, its multi-dimensional art of sermon, vision, alliterative poem and allegory.[8] This thesis examines specific scenes in Langland's poem in order to demonstrate the connection between form and meaning in *Piers Plowman.* It argues that the particular and unique form of Langland's theological investigation offers its own substantive contributions to the development of Christian doctrine in late medieval England as well as the means of participating in such development when wayfarers find themselves caught between rival communities competing for the authority to claim 'truth'.

§ Langland's Theological Poetics: Towards an Integrated Approach

In the mid-twentieth century, historians and theologians popularized declension narratives of the 'waning' middle ages or the 'breakdown of the medieval synthesis'.[9] More recent studies have focused on the diverse range of experiences in particular religious communities as well as literary witnesses that suggest a more complicated confluence of cultural decline, revolutionary energy, reformist zeal and even stability.[10]

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[7] See David Aers, *Beyond Reformation: an essay on William Langland's* Piers Plowman *and the end of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).
[8] Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969).
[9] For instance, see Johan Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the 14th & 15th Centuries* trans. F. Hopman (New York, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1949, repr. 1954) and David Knowles *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1962, repr. 1988).
[10] For instance, Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Alters: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992, 2005) offers perhaps one of the most sweeping laments of cultural decline. Caroline Walker Bynum *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982) and John Van Engen *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) are examples of illuminating studies of particular reformist communities. James Simpson *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) analyzes a wide

Locating Langland's poetry within such a complicated historical moment requires attention to the detail of the art as well as the context in which it was produced.

In late medieval England, competing claims concerning the praxis and identity of the church emerge as certain Wycliffites and other vernacular writers challenge the consonance between the teachings of the 'chirche' and its 'clerkis', with the teachings of the Bible. Anne Hudson points out the way the *Lanterne of Lizt* expresses this tension,

> Here summe obiectun that the gospel is not of autorite but in a miche as the chirche hath autorised it and cannonisid it, the thei sein that no man knowith suche wordis to be the gospel, but as the chirche hath determyned in her determynacioun. This conclusion semeth to smak [smell of] heresie.[11]

Resisting such a wedge between scripture and tradition, Thomas Netter and fellow clergymen were quick to point out, '3if thou spekist of the bible, thane seyen antecristis clerkis 'How provest thou that it is holy wryt more thane annother writen book?''[12] For Netter, Scripture is a fruit of the church's life, while for the author of the *Lanterne of Lizt* the church itself is a creature of the gospel.[13] At the heart of this tension lies a question of interpretive authority. Specifically, the tension between those, on the one hand, who would argue that the church is a community vivified by the Holy Spirit, uniquely empowered to interpret the ethical and ideological implications of the Bible. And those, on the other hand, who insist that the Bible is itself somehow capable of standing over the interpretive authority of a web of traditions and institutions called 'church'. If the latter,

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range of literary sources that display a rigorous debate over the possibilities and limitations of cultural and institutional change in the fourteenth through the mid-sixteenth centuries.

[11] *The Lanterne of Lizt* edited from MS Harl. 2324 by Lilian M. Swinburn, Early English Text Society, 151 (1917), Chapter VI p. 30-1, cited in Hudson *The Premature Reformation,* p. 230.

[12] Quoted in Anne Hudson *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 231.

[13] *The Lanterne of Lizt*, Chapter VI, pp. 30-1.

who could claim such interpretive authority over and against such a historical community and who would be capable of determining the validity of rival claims to normative biblical interpretation that emerge either within or outside this one holy catholic church? The juxtaposition of the preceding epigraphs from Augustine and Milton, which will receive further comment below, crystalizes this tension.

Disciplinary and periodic divisions within the modern university and scholarly norms often impede sustained academic focus upon the symbiotic relation between theology and poetry in a work like *Piers Plowman.* Contemporary ideologies and predispositions can also shape and obfuscate the poem's reception by modern readers. These institutional and ideological hurdles present difficulties for approaching a text like *Piers Plowman* with the type of cross-disciplinary thinking that generated the text. As Cristina Cervone has recently noted in her own attempt to think along with the poem's overlapping discursive modes, *Piers Plowman* was produced at a historical moment in which 'disciplinary conventions had not yet split philosophy from theology, and literary studies as such did not exist'.[14]

Benson's warning taken on board, there is, however, no need to make of Langland either a theologian or a poet. Such a distinction is a distinction without difference that results in a false dichotomy. The present study aims to demonstrate how Langland's modes of discursivity maximize the representational capacity of language through a dialectical poetic that is fascinated by the way human makings, linguistic, cultural and institutional, are transformed as they engage and are engaged by that mysterious contact point between the finite and the Infinite. This study pays particular attention to the

[14] Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 17-18.

development of Christian doctrine – God's act of self-revelation occurring through the linguistic processes of the Church learning to speak about God – as a key contact point between the finite and the Infinite in which Langland's poem both participates and contributes.

A number of recent studies have paid attention to the profound relationship between poetic and theological form in *Piers Plowman*.[15] Mary Carruthers argues that *Piers Plowman* participates in an Augustinian tradition 'searching for a truly Christian rhetoric […] out of a sense that a rhetoric has failed and has led men away from Truth rather than toward him'.[16] For Carruthers, the poem's quest for a redeemed language is ultimately and intentionally unfulfilled as a gesture towards the partialness, the inadequacy, of theological language.[17] Nicolette Zeeman advances what Carruthers describes as the necessary limit of theological language through the particular lens of Fruedian/Lacanian psycho-analysis suggesting that the poem reframes not only language, but also sin, seeing both as a location in which failure, or lack, generate new desires that propel both the poem and the pilgrim further along the search for truth.[18] Cristina Cervone's work, maintaining an equally sustained interest in the poem's quest for a redeemed language, goes in a different direction than Zeeman by investigating the constructive representational capacity of Langland's poetry. Cervone rightly situates

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[15] The following studies are also worth noting for their contributions to this line of inquiry as it relates specifically to *Piers Plowman* and beyond: James Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012); David C. Mahan, *An Unexpected Light: Theology and Witness in the Poetry and Thought of Charles Williams, Micheal O'Siadhail, and Geoffrey Hill* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

[16] Mary Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in* Piers Plowman (Evanston, IN: Nothwestern University Press, 1973), p. 19.

[17] Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth,* p. 173. For another contribution in this strand of interpretation, see also Pamela Raabe *Imitating God* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

[18] Nicolette Zeeman, Piers Plowman *and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Piers Plowman within a tradition of late medieval vernacular texts that share a common interest in what she calls Incarnational poetics:

> An Incarnational poetic… epitomizes a way in which writers sought to understand the relationship of God to humanity by encoding the concept of the Incarnation within linguistic and rhetorical forms that point to Christian truths. […] Their strategies for puzzling over the Incarnation encourage readings based in rhetorical or poetic schemes but more often in tropes such as metaphor, reification, personification, and the near-personification I will call *linguistic dilation*, which is a momentary stretching out (*dialatio*) of language such that words nearly take on agency as they fleetingly almost act within their localized context. Such imagining complements the activity, as these writers see it, of the Incarnation – the willed, kenotic leaping of love – so that if we hear only 'static' in 'hypostatic,' we have missed their point, theologically, linguistically, and even poetically, because the two-way pull of the Incarnational thought is expressed by means of form.[19]

As the following analysis will demonstrate, *Piers Plowman* is brimming with poetic scenes that employ such 'linguistic dialation' to investigate some of the most complex theological puzzles in the Christian tradition. Cervone's illuminating close readings of a range of texts demonstrate the ways in which Langland is not alone in experimenting with such a mode of theological discourse. Indeed, Cervone makes a strong case for a late medieval vernacular tradition interested in exploring the transformational capacity of the human word being met by and swept up into the Word made flesh.[20]

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[19] Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation,* pp. 3, 6.

[20] Another recent study engaging the constructive possibilities of *Piers Plowman*'s rhetoric, but that extents past linguistic or representational transformation to include moral/tropological transformation through the act of interpretation, is Ryan McDermott's *Tropologies: ethics and invention in England, c. 1350-1600*

Another important strand of critical scholarship attending to the theological trajectory of Langland's poem is evident in the work of Greta Hort. Arguing that '*Piers Plowman* is a theological poem', Hort suggests the poem participates in an orthodox theological movement that involved 'the awakening of the 'lewed' to intellectual pursuits, the filling up of the gap that separated priests from people, not by dragging priests down to the ignorance of the laity, but by raising the laity to the standard of the better among the priests'.[21] Exactly *which* theological traditions the poem participates in and develops has generated a wide range of interpretations. Morton Bloomfield and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, for example, have suggested that the theological visions of *Piers Plowman* participate in various strands of apocalyptic thought that strain towards social reform.[22] In contrast, Edward Vasta argues that Langland's goal is not social, but rather 'that of the mystic: the quest in this life for the real but supernatural union between the soul, with its powers of knowledge and love, and God'.[23] Other significant studies, such as those of Wendy Scase and Edwin Craun, have examined the poem within the context of contemporary tensions in fourteenth-century England between clergy and laity, and the theological puzzles yoked with the theory and practice of fraternal correction.[24]

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016). A condensed and published version is to be found in his '"*Beatus qui verba vertit in opera*": *Langland's Ethical Invention and the Tropological Sense*', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 24 (2010), pp. 169-204.

[21] Greta Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought* (London: MacMillan, 1938), p. 158.

[22] Bloomfield locates *Piers Plowman* within an apocalyptic tradition of pre-twelfth century Carthusian discourse straining towards, and failing, to achieve social perfection. Kerby-Fulton builds on Bloomfield's work, but then locates Langland within various traditions of 'reformist apocalypticism', especially the work of Joachim of Fiore. See Morton Bloomfield *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse* (Rutgers, NY: Rutgers University Press, 1962) and Kathyrn Kerby-Fulton *Reformist Apocalypticism and* Piers Plowman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[23] Edward Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis for Piers Plowman* (The Hague: Mouten and Comp, 1965), pp. 20, 13.

[24] See Wendy Scase 'Piers Plowman' *and the New Anti-clericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Edwin Craun *Ethics and Power in English Reformist Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

The analysis performed in this thesis learns from these studies, while making its own argument about the way in which Langland is participating in and contributing to his inherited theological traditions. The argument includes and yet extends beyond the poem's language and specifically attends to the cultures, institutional structures and linguistic communities through which language is both passed on and recreated over time.[25] For it is not just language itself, but also the social and institutional bearers and producers of language that Langland's work participates in and hopes to transform. David Aers' scholarship is particularly pioneering and influential in this regard. Aers articulates the integrated perspective of his approach as

> emerg[ing] out of a fascination with the ways in which certain late medieval Christians and their Church addressed the immense resources of Christian tradition. They did so at a time when the common pursuit of salvation generated differences which came to seem, to some of the participants, uncontainable within the current ecclesiastical polity. So the fascination, for me, is with complex processes which are at once

[25] Many underlying tensions between, on the one hand, psycho-analytic readings that focus on the significance of the poem's linguistic failure, and on the other hand, readings that attempt to draw out the constructive capacity of the poem's discursive modes are in part a product of late-twentieth century developments in critical theory that either confuse or ignore the way Langland would have framed such tensions. The tensions surrounding the limitations of human language popularized by Saussure, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and others in the second half of the twentieth century were already being considered, albeit in different modes, in and preceding the fourteenth century through theological engagement with the dialectic between apophatic and cataphatic speech [See Denys Turner's *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)]. This is a linguistic and theologically significant discourse that Thomas Aquinas explored through his articulation of the distinctions between univocal, equivocal and analogical speech [see especially his *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God* trans. by Anton C. Pegis F.R.S.C. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) Chapters 32-34]. Theological language is, by the very nature of the speaker and its object, partial. But that partiality is not static. Analogical speech generates and opens up creative space capable of holding tensions together, the very object of John Wyclif's, not always appreciated, *via media* [see especially Michael Wilks 'The Early Oxford Wyclif: Papalist or Nominalist?' in Anne Hudson, ed. *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice* (Exeter: Oxbow Books, 2000) pp. 45-9]. Both psycho-analytic and constructive studies of Langland's poetry are important avenues through which to appreciate the range of possibilities for the poem's significance, as are the social and psychological contributions of Freudian, Marxist and Nietchzian readings. However, pitting pyscho-analytic and constructive readings of *Piers Plowman* against each other risks falling not only into a false, but also a potentially anachronistic, dichotomy, see Victor E. Taylor's 'Wounding Theology and Literature', *English Language Notes*, 44 (2006), pp. 13-18.

> theological and institutional, doctrinal, and political. These are the processes of tradition formation, reformation, and preservation in changing cultural circumstances. And the fascination, for me, is especially with the contribution of certain texts to those processes.[26]

Akin to Aers' approach, this study of *Piers Plowman* is concerned not only with the way the poetry experiments with the representational capacity of language, but extends specifically to the transformational capacity of the poetry for the ecclesial structures, theological traditions and practices of worship the poet receives. As Aers puts it,

> Just as we inhabit traditions which enable us to carry out certain inquiries, and which preclude others, so Langland, […] composed inquiries and made choices (sometimes difficult, sometimes dangerous, sometimes with barely a thought) within the traditions [he] inhabited. And in [his] tradition-formed choices, in [his] inquiries and arguments, [he] contributed to continuation and change in the formation of these traditions, traditions of discourse which were also forms of life.[27]

It is *Piers Plowman's* contribution to 'forms of life', lives embodied with particular focus in the life of the church and which are informed by the ways the church grows in its understanding of and participation in God, that animate the current thesis. Specifically, how the poem's inherited modes of discourse and debate shape the poem, and also how the poem attempts to develop and transform its received traditions through a vernacular poetry in the context of a Latinate ecclesiastical polity. Langland's poem explores not

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[26] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. vii. See also his *Chaucer Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) and *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
[27] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, p. xi.

only the possibility of a redeemed rhetoric, as argued by Carruthers, but also the possibility for the transformation of institutions, and specifically the church, which are themselves locations in which modes of discourse are formed, reformed and passed on in the midst of changing corporate practices (for example, worship) and cultural circumstances.

These links between language, culture and institutional transformation were both unavoidable and controversial in late fourteenth-century England. The Great Schism of 1378 left many wondering about the proper relation not only between Rome and the church in England, but also about the proper relation between the church and the English king.[28] Questions concerning the proper bearer of theological authority were not separate from investigations concerning the proper office of earthly dominion, church and realm.

As Nicholas Watson demonstrates, many of these debates spilled out of the Latin confines of the universities and royal courts and into English vernacular writing, a mode of discourse that became itself politically freighted in Langland's context.[29] For instance, Watson shows the tensions between a thinker like William Butler who, on the one hand, draws on the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition of the hierarchical order of religious knowledge and who warns against translations of the bible and the dangers of vernacular theology; and on the other hand, Richard Ullerston who defends the open availability of religious

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[28] See Peter Heath *Church and Realm 1272-1461: Conflict and Collaborations in an Age of Crisis* (London: Fontana Press, 1988) and R.W. Southern *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1970).

[29] Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitution of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), pp. 822-64. See also *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Post Medieval Vernacularity* ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, ed., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

texts to all in the vernacular on grounds derived from the narrative of scripture itself. As Watson explains,

> Ullerston himself (prudently) submits to the will of the church and identifies that will with the decisions of prelates, but he is clear that both precedent and truth are on the side of vernacular theology as a legitimate instrument of lay instruction. […] Ullerston places an idealistic, but canonically correct, picture of Christian society as a harmonious, hierarchic community where knowledge is accessible to all without threat to truth, propriety, or social discipline […]. For Ullerston, the laity are not swine undeserving of the pearls of knowledge (fol. 204v) but the people of God to whom Christ preached in the mother tongue (fol. 207r) and who both need and are fit to receive God's law translated into that tongue.[30]

Watson makes clear that the tensions between Butler and Ullerston's positions are not limited to linguistic norms as such, for instance whether the English language is capable of expressing the Word of God with the same degree of nuance and elasticity as Latin, but rather extend to tensions between social classes and the politics through which certain communities, and not others, are deemed worthy to engage the Word of God and interpret it for the times.[31]

§ Authority and Interpretation: An Eschatological Orientation

[30] Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', pp. 841, 846.
[31] Watson's main concern is to elucidate the political implications bound up in performing vernacular theology. See also Alastair Minnis and A.B. Scott *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100-1375: The Commentary-Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Wogan-Browne, et al, eds, *The Idea of the Vernacular*.

These tensions between authority and interpretation are gestured to in the quotations of the epigraph to this introduction. Augustine and Milton, writing on opposite sides of one of the most disruptive social and intellectual transformations in Western Civilization, understand the true religion of God's self-revelation as mediated to humanity in very different ways.[32] For Augustine, some level of trust in the received authority of the church is necessary in order for a person to enter into true religion, while for Milton, discerning truth is a burden each person must take on for themselves, trusting only the application of their own individual mind to discern God's self-revelation through scripture. Milton's anxiety about the corruptibility of inherited authority leads him, like many reformers past and present, to dislocate authority from the writings and institutions of a received tradition and to transfer it to the discernment of the individual. What Milton fails to appreciate is that Augustine's willingness to trust on faith the teachings of the church does not preclude his active engagement with and, in some cases the transformation of, those received teachings. That is to say, as Alasdair MacIntyre's work has argued, Augustine does not conceive of the tension as one between total submission to an unimpeachable magisterium on the one hand, or the freewheeling will of the individual on the other. Instead, Augustine sees the initial act of trust in received authority as a necessary first step for a person to enter into and engage a living tradition, a tradition that will transform the participant just as the participant will likewise join in the

[32] My reference to the disruptive social and intellectual transformation in western Europe is to the complex political, cultural and intellectual histories bound up in the Reformation. See in this connection Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 3rd Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 1981); and Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

life of a community that will in turn both carry on and transform an inherited tradition.[33] Living traditions, so MacIntyre argues, are composed of historically contingent webs of texts, practices and communities that are themselves constantly in flux.[34] The significance of this, for Augustine, is not merely to affirm or record complex and historically continent genealogies of divine pedagogy. Rather, it is grounded in the idea that these ornate tapestries of texts, practices and communities are some of the very means through which God reweaves broken human beings back together with one another and with God towards the end of the Christian journey itself: love. Augustine describes it thus:

> Then again charity itself, which binds people together with the knot of unity, would have no scope for pouring minds and hearts in together, as it were, and blending them with one another, if human beings were never to learn anything from each other.[35]

Piers Plowman is engaged in the complex processes involved in this reception of, participation in and development of tradition, while sharing Augustine's view that such processes ultimately find their true end in charity.[36] This thesis argues that the particular forms of writing in which the poem does so are indivisible from the linguistic, social and institutional transformations towards which Langland's theological visions strain. That is to say, *Piers Plowman* resists theology's proclivity for being 'seduced by the prospect of

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[33] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 84.
[34] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
[35] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, prooem., linea 98, 'deinde ipsa caritas, quae sibi homines inuicem nodo unitatis adstringit, non haberet aditum refundendorum et quasi miscendorum sibimet animorum, si homines per homines nihil discerent', trans. Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, p. 103.
[36] David Aers suggests as much in his *Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination*, p. 61: '[Langland] wished to criticize and reform society and church within the framework of the traditional ideology and authority he often affirmed; yet his poem's intense imaginative and intellectual engagement with his world embodies a vision whose total movement and minute particulars negate and subvert this ideology'.

by-passing the question of how it learns its own language,'[37] and is likewise just as critically aware of the difficulties of theological meaning-making in the vernacular as Geoffrey Chaucer is in his conclusion to *Troilus and Criseyde*,

> And for ther is so gret diversite /
> In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge, /
> So prey I God that non myswrite the, /
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge; /
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe, /
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche![38]

How to speak truthfully about God without being misunderstood? One of the primary aims of this thesis is to elucidate the distinct capacity of Langland's vernacular poetry to participate in the complex processes of doctrinal development, specifically the way in which the church learns to speak truthfully about God through time, in late-fourteenth century England.

Before considering Langland's attentiveness to the complexities of meaning making in his chosen medium of vernacular poetry in particular, a few words on meaning making more generally from a philosophical perspective helpfully frames and illuminates his work further.[39] Wittgenstein's theory of the relation between language and ideas resonates in many ways with Langland's.[40] As Stanley Cavell explains, for Wittgenstein,

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[37] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p. 132.
[38] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* V.1793-8 in *The Riverside Chaucer,* ed. Larry D. Benson 3rd edit. (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).
[39] Minnis, Alastair J., and A.B. Scott (with the assistance of David Wallace) *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism: c. 1100 – c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
[40] There are not only parallels between Wittgenstein's language theory and Langland's poetry. Wittgenstein also provides a helpful way to engage the philosophical nature of Langland's linguistic investigations without getting bogged down in the (sometimes unhelpful) categories of 'realism' and 'idealism' often used to describe medieval epistemology (see Étienne Gilson *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* trans. A.H.C.

> We do not first know the object to which, by means of criteria, we assign value; on the contrary, criteria are the means by which we learn what our concepts are, and hence 'what kind of object anything is.'[41]

Knowledge of things, so Wittgenstein insists, does not precede our language, but rather our knowledge comes into being through the processes of language. Furthermore, the linguistic process is not performed in private, but is thoroughly public and communal:

> The criteria Wittgenstein appeals to – those which are, for him, the data of philosophy – are always 'ours', the 'group' which forms his 'authority' is always, apparently, the human group as such, the human being generally. When I voice them, I do so, or take myself to do so, as a member of that group, a representative human.[42]

Or, as Wittgenstein himself puts it,

> How could one describe the human way of behaving? Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of human beings as they interweave. What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is not what *one* man is doing *now,* an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly [*das ganze Gewimmel*] of human actions, the background against which we see any action.[43]

Downes (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1936), pp. 229-47). That being said, Michael Wilks makes good use of what is at stake in the category 'realist' when he explains of John Wyclif 'he came to believe that extreme Realism in philosophy was being used to underpin a perverted Augustinianism in theology which gave total universal power to the papacy at the expense of national communities, and therefore all branches of learning were in urgent need of reform' ['John Wyclif, Reformer, c. 1327—1384' in Hudson, *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, p. 5].

[41] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Trgedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 16.

[42] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason,* p. 18.

[43] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel,* ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), pp. 567-9.

The 'whole hurly-burly' of human existence is, for Wittgenstein, the location in which human understanding is forged through historical developments of communal practice and language. As Fergus Kerr explains, 'Nothing [for Wittgenstein] is more foundational to the whole human enterprise than the community that we create in our natural reactions to one another as they have been cultivated and elaborated in a very contingent historical tradition.'[44]

As a result of this commitment to the communal processes of the creation of criteria which is fundamental to the processes of linguistic meaning making, Wittgenstein is willing to consider the possibility that, 'One human being can be a complete enigma to another' when a person fails to share the criteria which results from shared judgments and forms of life between radically distinct communities.[45] Langland's attentiveness to the possibility of this sort of linguistic dissonance is powerfully evident in Passus VI of the C-version of *Piers Plowman*. Here the character Repentance fails to share a common language with Covetousness, and declares, concomitantly, that Covetousness is an *unkynde* creature who cannot be forgiven.[46] While this scene and unorthodox view haunt the poem, Langland's explorations of linguistic processes do not abandon the hope of the real, yet mysterious, link between the human and the divine Word, the hope that God in Christ does share most intimately in *kynde* with humanity. Though certain scenes and exchanges explore theologically 'unorthodox' positions, *Piers Plowman* does so as it

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[44] Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 2nd Edition (Londond: SPCK Press: 1986), p. 76.
[45] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1953), p. 223. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason,* p. 30. Herbert McCabe takes this notion up theologically, and in conversation with Wittgenstein in his *Love, Law and Language* (Continuum: New York, NY1968, 2003), pp. 63-103 at 84, 'Meanings, then, are ways of entering into social life, ways of being with each other. The kind of meanings available in the language of a society – taking 'language' in its widest extent to include all conventionally determined signs and symbols – constitute the way in which people are with each other in that community. 'To imagine a language,' as Wittgenstein says, 'is to imagine a form of life'.
[46] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* VI.234-300.

strains to participate in the development of Christian doctrine, which is itself a participation in processes through which God the Word transforms finite human language through language, as that language is itself swept up into the Word. This is a transformation that is simultaneously a transformation of contemporary cultural and institutional forms that God enacts in order to resist the abandonment of both persons and the church to the linguistic and social chaos of Babel.

This thesis will argue that while *Piers Plowman* strains towards cultural and institutional transformation, the poem leans eschatologically in a way aptly described by Herbert McCabe thus:

> The Christian moral outlook is essentially drawn from our contact with the future. It is based upon the virtue of hope. It transcends the present and is never wholly explicable in terms of the present and is never wholly explicable in terms of the present because it is revolutionary. For this reason, […], the Christian moral position will always in the end seem unreasonable to the contemporary world.[47]

Langland's theological visions strain towards a future hope by way of a form of writing that at times seems revolutionary and unreasonable; unreasonable at least to those who would prefer to maintain social institutions through reform. For Langland, however, reform and revolution are not the only options. This thesis aims to demonstrate the ways the poetic forms and dialectical processes constitutive of *Piers Plowman*'s theological vision(s) participate in the development of doctrine from the ground up, grammatically, with attention to a range of institutions and individual interlocutors, cultural practices and revelations that coordinate in an organic process of ongoing theological discovery.

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[47] Herbert McCabe, *Love, Law and Language* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1968), pp. 154-5.

Langland's model, I suggest, is distinct from a top down model of hierarchical reception of divine ideas, as if theological language were merely the mediated expression of pre-existing concepts. While God's divine ideas precede human knowing, *Piers Plowman* takes seriously the complex processes through which God mediates knowledge to human beings through the learning of language capable of expressing those divine ideas. For Langland, this is a process that requires a community, and a community that shares forms of life made possible by shared judgments which are themselves made possible through the sharing of language. The *telos* of this vision is not merely noetic, but as Augustine notes above, ultimately oriented towards charity: the love that is the reconciliation of God and humanity. For Langland, God's mode of mediating God's-self is not strictly 'natural'. That is to say, for Langland, God's mediation of God's-self to humanity is not limited to 'natural' processes of learning language in communities.[48] For Langland, this process also includes interruptions, what Cervone refers to as 'leaps of love', that reflect the logic of the Incarnation.

Therefore, this thesis will consider the way *Piers Plowman* inherits and performs theology in such a way that identifies the primary location for the development of doctrine linguistically, culturally and institutionally not in the magisterium, the royal court, the individual, or even the community understood in congregationalist terms. Instead, Langland's theology emerges through the dialectical engagement between this entire cacophony of voices as they learn to sing around the table: the same table through which God's presence and absence interrupts and transforms human speech about God into the embodiment of God's love made manifest in Christ. For Langland, the Eucharist

[48] See especially Rebecca Davis' recent study on *kynde*, *Piers Plowman,* Piers Plowman *and the Books of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

is a performative activity through which God's creatures are invited to participate in their deification in and through the charity of God. This is not reducible to a notion of the deification of an individual, as argued by Vasta. Instead, this vision extends towards the sanctification of the entire creation through the particular mediation of the Christian *polis,* the church, as it enacts the social embodiment of *caritas,* the unifying and healing work of the Body of Christ in the world. At the altar, the present fuses with the past, a diverse and divided community is united with the One Lord Jesus Christ, and the Infinite enters into and takes on the finite: God works through this sacramentally reformed communion of sinners and saints to heal and accompany a wounded creation towards a future of promised, yet, unrealized glory. It is therefore through communion, in the fullest sense of the word, that Langland practices and performs his craft, his makings, or theological art. It is through modeling such a dense and layered concept of communion, beyond the sacrament itself and including the communion of discourse constituting the church's whole life, that Langland offers his written work as a resource, an *exemplum*, for navigating rival claims to both Christian community and doctrine. Langland's poetic communion attends to the ways God interrupts from the inside of these ever-shifting contexts of human life.

Readers of *Piers Plowman* may justifiably question the argument that Langland's poetry offers discursive communion as a means to participate in and discern doctrinal development in the midst of rival communities offering competing truth claims. After all, the poem ends without anyone actually receiving the Eucharist, and with one of the work's primary figures, Conscience, abandoning the church, and the other, Will, downtrodden and wandering not knowing where to eat (an almost certain Eucharistic

pun) yet commanded by Kynde (God) to remain in 'Vnity' (the fourteenth-century church in England portrayed as besieged by Anti-christ and the seven deadly sins). The burden of this thesis is precisely to demonstrate the ways Langland's discursive communion is at the heart of Langland's theological vision(s) as a means through which to negotiate diverse, and often competing, ways of speaking about God and ways in which God extends grace through the church. The argument unfolds in three steps.

Chapter one demonstrates the poem's complex analysis of the self within the context of what Wittgenstein referred to as the whole hurly-burly [*das ganze Gewimmel*] of human actions and institutions. Through a close reading of *Piers Plowman,* Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale,* the chapter argues that *Piers Plowman*'s representation of selfhood problematizes medieval catholic teaching on ecclesial authority. Langland and Chaucer's respective thought experiments imagine the possibilities of errant clerks, who in turn form communities, wherein sin is literally built into the scaffolding of society. If the formation of such a sin-enclosed society is possible, and if the late medieval church has been so co-opted, as Langland and Chaucer's poetry considers, might the church's discernment of its own doctrine be impossible, a lost cause?

Chapter two-one analyzes the figure of Conscience to demonstrate the way Langland represents Conscience as an incredibly malleable figure, susceptible to a myriad of influences at the king's court. At stake here is if the church is susceptible to error (as Chaucer and Langland are shown to imagine in Chapter 1), and if Conscience is not trustworthy, then what authority might Christians turn towards to discern the church's doctrine? Chapter two-two then examines Langland's subtle depiction of sin. The

analysis demonstrates the degrees to which Langland's poetry leaves open not only the possibility of errant clerks, or a sin-enclosed society, or a contorted Conscience, or a co-opted and sin-sealed 'church', but also the horrifying possibility that people so malformed within such a sin-enclosed society/church might be made 'unkynde', unforgivable (as, for example, Covetousness in Passus VI), while not being able to recognize their own deformation. The chapter then considers Langland's depiction of this horrifying possibility within a theological context by way of a comparative analysis including Saint Augustine, Boethius and Saint Anselm. As such, Chapter two-two demonstrates the remarkable tension Langland's poetry applies to the question: Is the church, much less its ongoing practice of discerning the development of its doctrine, even possible? And further demonstrates the ways in which Langland's poetry raises the stakes: Is human salvation possible at all?

Chapter three begins with a survey of two of the most influential contemporary interpretations of Langland's theological and ecclesial vision offered by James Simpson and David Aers. I then introduce Henri de Lubac's account of the church as a 'translucent medium' as a hint towards an alternative reading of Langland's ecclesiology. The chapter analyzes four key figures in the poem (Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium*, the Samaritan and the Christ who harrows hell) and argues that through these four figures Langland's poetry dialectically unfolds to represent his vision of the church. I argue that Langland's ecclesiology, depicted through the dialectical unfolding of these four teachers, subverts Conscience's reformation of the church (Vnity) at the poem's end. Specifically, *Piers Plowman*'s dialectical process demonstrates the errors bound up in Conscience's stewardship of the Eucharist within Vnity, while also critiquing his decision to depart

from Vnity at the poem's end. I argue that Langland's ecclesiology is not reducible to either reformism (Simpson) or congregationalism (Aers), but is rather represented through a more elusive mode. The church, for Langland, is present and discernable in the practice of (re)telling the narratives of Christ's Incarnation, passion, and resurrection coupled with images and sacraments that push human beings towards contemplation of the Trinity. Langland's ecclesiology does offer a ruthless critique of the late medieval church, but in doing so, I argue, he also critiques those who might abandon the community which persists even in its brokenness to tell and enact the stories that draw human beings into the infinite mystery of the triune God revealed in Christ. *Piers Plowman* thus offers a pedagogy, an apprenticeship or training, in both the content and the form of speech that is, for the poet, most capable to aid Christian pilgrims along the iterative and unending journey towards *caritas* in the midst of the dizzying maze of the world.

Chapter 1

A Theology of Selfhood

A complex account of a person, a 'self', emerges through the C-version of *Piers Plowman*.[49] To examine this is to study in particular Langland's nuanced account of human beings as creatures formed in and constituted by communities and institutions through which Christian identity is formed. As such, this chapter will pay particular attention to the institution of the late-medieval church and Langland's ecclesiology. Following a detailed exposition of Langland's nuanced account of a particular self, Will, the chapter then analyzes the ways in which the poem depicts the formation of Will's identity as not only wrapped up in the formation one receives in the church, but also the church as an institution which is itself in complex relation with the coercive powers of

[49] Admittedly, the language of selfhood is historically conditioned. I find the language of 'self' helpful here only insofar as it serves as a reference to the sense of human identity Charles Taylor explores in his investigation of the intellectual history of selfhood, 'One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it…A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution.'…The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community' in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 34-36. For Taylor's account of the historically conditioned nature of the language of self see, pp. 111-210. Further studies exploring the 'self' within the context of individual and communal identity in the middle ages include M.D. Chenu's 'Monk, Canons, and Laymen in Search of Apostolic Life' in *Nature Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 202-38; R.W. Southern's 'The Religious Orders' in *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1990), pp. 214-99; Colin Morris *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?' in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 82-109; John Van Engen *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and for a study specifically focused upon such representations in *Piers Plowman* see David Aers *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988).

the emerging nation-state in late medieval England. As complex as this relation is, this chapter will argue that Langland's investigation of a self extends beyond both introspection and church/state relations and focuses upon the particular cluster of questions constitutive of the relationship between a person's coming to faith (*fides qua*) and the way the church negotiates its own authority in the process of faith's unfolding across time (*fides quae*).

To do so an additional and complementary analysis is required, namely of Thomas Aquinas' theological account of the role of the pope in discerning the development of doctrine and as an example that significantly informs the late medieval church. To be clear, the distinctions Aquinas makes between *fides qua* and *fides quae* have a long history going back at least to Augustine's *De utilitate credenda,* discussed below. However, in the time between Augustine and Aquinas, this distinction develops in ways that reflect the mutually informing relationship between the institutional forms the church takes on and the theology figures like Aquinas develop in order to describe those institutional developments. As such, the proceeding analysis of Aquinas' theology of the development of doctrine does not aim to suggest that Aquinas necessarily represents a deviation from Augustine's distinctions between *fides qua* and *fides quae,* but rather aims to examine Aquinas' detailed account as representative of the ways in which the institution of the late medieval church theologically framed a long process through which the power to discern the development of the church's doctine became increasingly centralized. For instance, the church's doctrine concerning the selection of popes, which for Aquinas is correlative to who has the power to discern the unfolding of the church's faith in time, develops in important ways from the Third Lateran Council (1179) to the

Second Council of Lyon (1274), ways which ultimately make Pope Boniface VIII's claims for the *plenitudo potestatis* in his famous bull *Unum sanctum* (1302) intelligible.[50] These institutional developments, while not unimaginable to Augustine, centralize the power of discerning the development of the church's docrine (*fides quae*) in ways that were outside of Augustine's lived experience and analysis. Aquinas' account offers a remarkably lucid and theologically compelling description of how the church justified the centralization of this power under the pope as necessary in order to defend the church against heresy. In Langland's England, Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* (1409) offer a contemporary English example of institutional and theological centralization of the church's power to discern – or proscribe – normative doctrine in response to the emergence of perceived Wycliffite heresy. However distasteful modern readers might find Arundel's *Constitutions* and the corresponding use of lethal state power to enforce it in early fifteenth century England[51], much of the logic which underpins Arundel's moves to centralize and protect the church's doctrinal power are grounded in Aquinas's own account. As such, Aquinas is examined at length in this chapter as an elucidating bridge between the preceding Augustinian account of *fides que* and *fides quae* and the institutionalization of those same principles that are used for a murderous defense of centralized ecclesial power in late medieval England under Archbishop Arundel. The proceeding argument examines Langland's analysis of this theology as well as his

[50] See especially Walter Ullman's *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Company, 1972) and Eamon Duffy's *Saints & Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
[51] Watson, Nicholas "Censorship and Cultral Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409" *Speculum* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 822-864.

proposal for alternative frameworks the late medieval church might employ to discern the development of doctrine.

For Langland, the doctrine pertaining to who has the power to discern the unfolding of the church's doctrine is not merely about who has power in the church, but specifically concerns who has power to discern the unfolding of the church's faith in time. Langland draws dazzling connections between the formation of individual and institutional identity by depicting both constructive and destructive developments of Will and the church. Langland's analysis reflects a powerful theological mind grappling with the implications of both the church's theology and lived experience which created the conditions for the Great Schism of 1378, when rival popes were elected and in turn excommunicated one another. The Great Schism raises critical questions not only to the church's practice of right doctrine but also to tensions within the doctrine itself – tensions that Langland, and contemporaries like Chaucer, examine deeply.

In this context it is important to note that Langland's poetry is not merely critical of the practical failure of the late medieval church to embody its own doctrine of papal election during the Great Schism, but more piercingly that the church's doctrine of papal authority emerges through what Langland's poem will depict as a series of a theological and institutional missteps which have devastating effects upon the church. For Langland, these questions are not referential to an abstract institution nor are these questions best examined in the restricted confines of late medieval scholastic disputations. Rather, these questions are only intelligible when considered in conversation with the broader 'field of folk', amidst the very people whose lives are both formed by and participate in the formation of the church through which the contours of Christian identity take shape. As

such, Langland's analysis of the church reveals a commitment to understanding the church and the self as deeply interconnected, though the poem's fierce and fearless analysis will result in placing even this fundamental commitment in tension.

§ Langland and the 'self'

Langland's poetry engages the puzzles around communal and institutional identity, selfhood and language in the first five lines of the Prologue,

> In a somur sesoun whan softe was the sonne
> Y shope me into shroudes as Y a shep were;
> In abite as an heremite vnholy of werkes
> Wente forth in the world wondres to here,
> And say many selles and selkouthe thynges.[52]

As Ralph Hanna has recently pointed out, the identity of the dreamer, 'Y', in these lines is suspended between a range of possibilities.[53] Is this 'Y' an innocent sheep, or a wolf clothed in order to deceive like the false prophet in Matthew 7:15?[54] Is this figure the very embodiment of holy hermitic life, a life key voices in the poem explicitly respect later on, but a life that is also inchoately related to the one Holy Catholic and apostolic

[52] Langland, William *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text* ed. Derek Pearsall (University of Exeter Press, 2008), Prologue.1-5, ['In a summer season when the sun shoe softly / I wrapped myself in woolens as if I were a sheep; / In a hermit's habit, unholy in his works, / I went out into the world to hear wonders / And to see many strange and seldom-known things.], trans. George Economou *William Langland's Piers Plowman: The C-version* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 3.
[53] Ralph Hanna, 'William Langland' in Larry Scanlon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 128.
[54] An analogy Wycliffite writers were fond of making when reflecting on the ecclesiastical hierarchy. See 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy' in Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections From English Wycliffite Writings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 75-83.

church in late medieval England?[55] Or is the dreamer's likeness a disguise, akin to that of Chaucer's haunting figure of the Pardoner who, 'stonde *lyk* a clerk in my pulpit' preaching greedily in order to feed his own covetousness rather than to stir his hearers towards confession of and conversion from avarice?[56] The space between the second and third line invite a positive association between the dreamer and a holy hermitic life, and yet the third line offers two irreconcilable possibilities. While the language 'as an hermite' invites associations of identity and likeness between the 'Y' and a true hermit, the structure of the third line simultaneously undermines how deep that likeness goes. Indeed, this teller subverts the validity of his own claim to authentic hermitic life as soon as he offers it. While he is like a hermit, he lacks a hermit's 'werkes' and thus where he locates himself between authenticity and deception remains fluid. Unlike Chaucer's Pardoner who audaciously confesses 'For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,' in *Piers Plowman*, the gap between the dreamer's works and his identity interrupt him, and so the audience, from self-confidently plowing on in an authoritative interpretation of the dream.[57] Here, the dreamer's identity is held together

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[55] That the poem holds out the possibility for a form of hermitic life that is truly admirable is evident in Prologue.30, and explicitly through *Liberum Arbitrium*'s high praise of 'suche eremytes' who lived according to the miraculous provision of God (XVII.6-36). However, serious reservations are expressed in Prologue.51-55 concerning the potential duplicitous nature of false hermits. For an excellent account of the precarious relation of late medieval English hermits to the institutional church see Nicholas Watson *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[56] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), VI.391. All subsequent references to Chaucer's works will be from this edition and cited by fragment and line number. Compare this line from Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* with a very similar line in *Piers Plowman* drawing attention to the danger of clerical semblances, 'Ther prechede a pardoner as he a prest were' (Prologue.66-67). The link between these two pardoners (Langland's and Chaucer's) will be made more explicit below.

[57] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.391. Preferring the term 'audience' over 'reader', 'hearer' or 'reader/hearer' in part stylistic, and in part substantive. Not only is 'audience' a cleaner signification, but it also gestures towards the social-dialectic that exists between texts, authors and the societies/cultures in which texts are produced. On the later, see Paul Strohm 'The Audience' in his *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), at p. 49, 'The utterance, according to Voloshinov, is a 'two-sided act…the product of a reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.' As such, it is to be regarded as the sole property neither of the speaker who frames it nor of the listener who

(or is it in the act of dissolving?) within a poetry that displays a communion of difference as constitutive of the dreamer's own self-understanding.

The dreamer's uncertain self-knowledge concerns more than the defensibility of his individual moral character. His vision of 'a fair feld of folk' scans the cultural scaffolding of society in late medieval England, a purview including those 'bidders' who beg for money in exchange for offering prayers, false beggars, lying pilgrims, lazy hermits, greedy friars, and a whole host of pardoners, parsons, priests, bishops, bachelors, masters and doctors who all trade in cash rather than the care of souls.[58] Yet, as the vision continues, it becomes clear that these identities are not equivalent to the simple dichotomies of true or false, ideal or hypocrite. Instead, the poetry demonstrates how the very meaning of the language necessary to define these various identities and practices becomes unstable.

A sharp example of this instability occurs when the dreamer describes friars for whom 'Here moneye and merchandise marchen togyderes'.[59] The friars' care of souls and the monetary compensation they receive in exchange for performing sacramental services do not exist in terms of either/or, true/false or ideal/hypocrite. Instead, these practices elide into an indivisibly composite, and transformed, process.[60] The same hand that forgives also demands payment for services rendered, generating a practice and a

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receives it, but as their common property. This is because the utterance is formed and received within the larger social milieu that embraces both speaker and listener and the more particular social relationship that exists between them; the organizing center of the utterance thus lies in the social circumstances and purposes of the discourse.'

[58] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.41-94.

[59] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.61, [Bind their love of money to their proper business.]

[60] Here, the poetry does more that James Simpson gives it credit when he suggests 'The friars have made their confessional activity a function of their economic interests, in such a way as to extinguish charity altogether', see James Simpson *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text* Second, Revised Edition (Longman, 1990), p. 30. It is not simply that charity is extinguished, but that the language and practice of this culture have conjoined previously disparate grammars (that of gift and profit, sacrament and merchandise) and transformed them into something new, strange and dangerous (Prologue.62-65).

language that hollows out the very meaning of gift and reduces the sacrament of penance to just one more commodity being traded in the marketplace alongside the cacophonous shouts of 'Hote pyes, hote! / Goodes gees and grys! Ga we dyne, ga we!'[61] In this exchange the *sacramentum* of penance, that gift of contrition, confession and forgiveness, suffers a transformation of identity as it is absorbed by and conformed into the principles of the market.[62] So too, the friars themselves experience a transformation of identity as subtle shifts in language and practice morph mendicancy into a sort of spiritual mercantilism.

Here, the poetry provides an exploration into the complex processes involved as perversions of language and practice initiate cultural and ecclesial transformations.[63] What results is not so much a false friar who might be easily identified and avoided. Rather, what results is a figure whose identity as a guide in the practices of confession, forgiveness and restitution, stands subtly changed. The once familiar doctor in the care of souls now bears but a shadow of benevolence. A wolf in sheep's clothing, the friar manipulates his art and his patient, indeed the very economy of salvation as understood in medieval Christianity, for cash. This friar whose ideal type begs for sustenance, receives all as gift, freely hears confession and bestows forgiveness in accordance with the *sacramentum* of penance, instead hawks his wares in a new competitive and commodified spiritual marketplace as if there were no other way.[64] Or, it is as if a gene

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[61] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.231-232, ['Get your hot pies! / Good geese and pig meat! Come on up and eat!'].
[62] See Thomas Tentler *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), and Peter Biller & A.J. Minnis, eds., *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013).
[63] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.62-65.
[64] The historicity of this sort of spiritual marketplace, filled with rival communities, orders and forms of life competing to claim their own as the normative form of Christian practice is well described in Bynum *Jesus*

once integral to the cellular reproduction necessary to sustain the molecular processes of the body has now undergone the transformation of a cancer. A very building block of the body, and in this instance the Body of Christ, has become a subtle agent of destruction from within as it mutates otherwise life-giving processes. This is the space into which the poem opens, and into which the poem's first representation of a self must negotiate its identity.[65] The strangeness of this self in the midst of, and uncertain about, its relation to rival and shifting voices in a competitive religious marketplace displays a bleak initial glance into the institutions and communities through which Will's identity will be formed. From this *das ganze Gewimmel*, Will meets a mysterious figure who paradoxically offers clearer counsel in this maze of the field.

This figure, the first figure in the poem who identifies and names the dreamer, is Holy Church.[66] She fills out the dreamer's identity beyond his name, 'Wille', by locating him within a history of past relations and actions. Specifically, through the act of his baptism and relationships with godparents who pledged his life to the church,[67]

> thou oughtest me to knowe;
> Thow broughtest me borewes my biddyng to fulfille,
> To leue on me and loue me al thy lyf-tyme.[68]

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as Mother, pp. 82-109. The situation would only become further dizzying in England in the late fourteenth century with the added presence of the Lollards.

[65] James Simpson suggests 'However much the opening of the poem might invite us to be wary about the voice of the narrator, who is 'unholy of werkes' (l. 3), the actual practice of the Prologue and Passus I seems to offer no space for the play of ironies that result from an untrustworthy voice' in *Piers Plowman: An Introduction,* p. 24. To the contrary, the plays of irony that result from this untrustworthy narrator/dreamer, and also between rival religious orders, communities and indeed the papacy itself, are precisely the object of the poem's attention in the opening lines.

[66] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, I.5-6.

[67] Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, 3rd ed. Spicilegium Bonaventurianum. 4 (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), lib. 4, dist. 6, cap. 6, par. 1.

[68] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, I.72-5, ['…you ought to know me; / I received you at first and made you free. / God parents pledged you to fulfill my bidding, / To believe in me and love me all your life.'].

The memory of this community and the sacramental practice of baptism, a practice that binds together the dreamer, God and a community, evokes an extraordinary reaction from Will,

> Thenne Y knelede on my knees and criede here of grace
> And preyede here pitously to preye for me to amende
> And also kenne me kyndly on Crist to bileue:
> 'Teche me to no tresor but telle me this ilke,
> How Y may saue my soule, that saynt art yholde.'[69]

Humbly kneeling on both knees, Will cries out for forgiveness and renews his long-forgotten journey towards an end which he does not yet understand, within a community which he cannot yet see, to believe in Christ and a salvation he cannot remember.

Will's encounter with Holy Church, the memory of his baptism and the renewal of his life-long journey of faith resonate deeply with Saint Augustine's own meditations. Amidst many possible sources across the Augustinian corpus, his *De utilitate credendi* and *Confessionum* are particularly apposite here. Augustine, writing to his Manichean friend Honoratus, recalls his habitation within a bewildering forest, that of Manicheanism, and his departure from that maze through piteous cries and the baptismal community of the church.[70] While Augustine's baptism is unlike Will's insofar as Augustine's baptism was delayed, the two figures share in their hearing of Holy Church's

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[69] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, I.76-80, [Then I fell to my knees and cried to her for grace / And begged her to take pity and pray I improve / And teach me plainly to believe in Christ: / 'Teach me no more of treasure, but tell me this, / Sainted lady, how may I save my soul.'].

[70] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, ed. J. Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiarum Latinorum, 25 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), cap. 8, par. 20, p. 25, linea 12: 'restabat autem aliud nihil in tantis periculis, quam ut diuinam prouidentiam lacrimosis et miserabilibus uocibus, ut opem mihi ferret, deprecarer' [In the midst of such great dangers there was nothing left for me except with tearful, piteous cries to implore divine providence to give me strength; and I did that earnestly] English translation from Augustine, *On Christian Belief* trans. Ray Kearney, Boniface Ramesy, ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: New City Press, 2005), p. 132.

voice, a shared determination to seek truth through accepting the teachings of this voice as well as the distinctive culture modeled by and passed on through a community of sponsoring godparents and friends.[71] Like Will in his first encounter with Holy Church, Augustine describes his willingness to believe in a certain weight of authority as a necessary step for entering into true religion.[72] To the consternation of Augustine's Manichean epistoler, faith comes before understanding because, for Augustine, the mind must be transformed along the way of understanding.[73] In addition to the puzzles around interpretive authority and uncertain identity, Augustine adds that a necessary disposition for the wayfarer journeying towards truth includes a willingness to depend upon the authority of a community that one does not yet know in order to advance towards a God who remains mysterious, all the while participating in and submitting to the transformation of one's mind along the way towards the goal of love.[74]

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[71] On Augustine's delayed baptism see Augustine *Confessionum libri XIII*, ed. Martin Skutella and Luc Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981) lib. 1, cap. 11, linea, 23. On Augustine's decision to become a catechumen see *Confessionum* lib. 5, cap.14, linea 35, 'statui ergo tandiu esse catechumenus in catholica ecclesia mihi a parentibus commendata, donec aliquid certi eluceret, quo cursum dirigerem' [I therefore decided for the time being to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which the precedent of my parents recommended to me, until some clear light should come by which I could direct my course], trans. Henry Chadwick *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 89.

[72] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, cap. 9, par. 21, p. 26, linea 13: 'nam uera religio, nisi credantur ea, quae quisque postea, si se bene gesserit dignus que fuerit, adsequatur atque percipiat, et omnino sine quodam graui auctoritatis imperio inire recte nullo pacto potest' [There is no right way of entering into the true religion without believing things that all who live rightly and become worthy of it will understand and see for themselves later on, and without some submission to a certain weight of authority] Augustine, *On Christian Belief* trans. Kearney, p. 133.

[73] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, cap. 16, par. 34, p. 43, linea 11: 'uerum igitur uidere uelle, ut animum purges, cum ideo purgetur, ut uideas, peruersum certe atque praeposterum est' [What defiles the mind, if I may explain it briefly, is love of anything at all other than the mind itself and God. The more one is cleansed of this defilement, the more easily one discerns the truth. Since, therefore, your mind is purified in order for you to see the truth, it is obviously perverse and absurd to want to see the truth in order to purify your mind] Augustine, *On Christian Belief* trans. Kearney, p. 145.

[74] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi,* cap. 17, par. 35, p. 46, linea 2: 'et si unaquaeque disciplina, quamquam uilis et facilis, ut percipi possit, doctorem aut magistrum requirit, quid temerariae superbiae plenius, quam diuinorum sacramentorum libros et ab interpretibus suis nolle cognoscere et incognitos audere damnare?' [To refuse to acknowledge her [the church's] primacy is assuredly either the height of sacrilege or the height of headstrong arrogance. If souls have no secure path to wisdom and salvation unless faith prepares the ground for understanding, is it anything but ingratitude for God's help and assistance if one chooses to resist such a strongly supported authority? If any subject, however lowly and easy to understand, requires a

Unlike Augustine, and despite Holy Church's sermon exhorting Will to seek the triune God of love, Will does not remain focused upon Holy Church's teaching, on Christ or on the hope of salvation that he so earnestly seeks.[75] Instead, Passus II begins with Will kneeling on both knees crying for grace, but now with a very different object of attention. He begs Holy Church, in a narrative moment that echoes Adam and Eve's shift of attention,

'Mercy, madame, for Mary loue of heuene
That bar that blessid barn that bouhte vs on the rode,
Kenne me by sum craft to knowe the false.'[76]

Will's desire for a skillful means to know 'false' directs him away from the baptismal community of godparents back to the chaotic field of folk, and particularly Lady Mede. This later figure, whose adornment and activity bear a mirror image of Holy Church, ravishes Will's heart making the profit and power of court and realm the obsession of Will's vision until he awakes at the beginning of Passus V.[77] With his vision so cast, Holy Church commends Will to Christ, but then departs the poem, never to return. As if Will's journey towards self-knowledge was not complicated enough, Will's search is now

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teacher or tutor, could there be anything more proud and reckless than to refuse to learn about the books of the divine mysteries from their interpreters and then dare to condemn them without knowing anything about them?] Augustine, *On Christian Belief* trans. Kearney, pp. 146-7.

[75] Siegfried Wenzel, 'Medieval Sermons' in *A Companion to* Piers Plowman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 155-72.

[76] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* II.2-4. Compare with Genesis 2:15-17, 3. It can be argued, and indeed it has been, that this early moment of directing attention away from God towards an ability to discern good from evil, initiates the fall. Augustine describes this directing of attention from God to the ability to discern good from evil as Adam and Eve's desire to assert their own authority against obedience to God (see Augustine *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL, 28 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), lib. 8 and lib. 11.

[77] The term 'raueschede' participates in a web of spiritual and ecclesial associations in this period. For instance, Richard Rolle uses the term 'raueschede' in his *Meditations on the Passion* to refer to his spiritual connection to Christ that emerges from focused devotion to Christ's crucifixion. That Langland uses the term here as a referent to Will being enamored with Lady Mede carries, therefore, a spiritual significance; see Watson, *Richard Rolle*.

further complicated as his wandering is thrust into the material world of wealth, power and class that overlap and shape ecclesial, national and regional identities.

§ Langland and the multiple contexts composing a 'self'

Passus V moves deeper into these themes of self, communal and institutional identity and language, but it does so with particular attention to the concrete historical realities that shape and form human identity in late-medieval England. Will awakens from his dreams of wealth and courtly power and finds himself roaming around Cornhill. He is soon met by Reason and Conscience who challenge his form of life because it does not seem to involve any meaningful work that might contribute to the good of the community.[78] Anne Middleton persuasively argues that this scene is the latest addition to the poem and that the encounter between Will, Reason and Conscience is best understood not only as the poet's *apologia*, but also that the scene is historically imbedded in the politics of the 1388 Vagrancy Statute.[79] The historical particulars of late-medieval England are here seamlessly woven into the poetry's study of the overlapping political and theological elements of selfhood. Three aspects of this scene are particularly illuminating and demonstrate Langland's unceasing engagement with these questions all the way through this latest edition of the work: (1) statecraft and obedience, (2) the language of '*lolleres*' and (3) the ongoing nature of the poem as a work that is indivisible from the perpetual development of a life.

[78] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.12-104.
[79] Anne Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy: The C Version 'Autobiography' and the Statute of 1388' in Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds., *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 208-93.

The Statute of 1388 marks a significant development, aspirational or real, in the power held by those in control of the emerging political formation of the English nation-state. Middleton explains,

> Virtually all historians who have discussed the 1388 vagrancy measure have remarked on the breathtaking thoroughness with which it projects surveillance and control, and they have registered with expressions of dismay and distaste their sense that the measure is not merely unprecedented but premonitory – of a fundamentally different relation of the pragmatic to the normative in sociopolitical thought and imagination, and an early sign of the formation of an idea of the state as such, as an entity with intrinsic and supervening interests somehow in excess of those of the communities and individuals that constitute it.[80]

Middleton further describes this development as involving a shift 'toward the view that law and government have an active rather than a custodial role in identifying and solving perceived social problems – and that the state in which this power resides is personified in acts of parliament and decisions of justices rather than in the will or edicts of the monarch'.[81] The date of the 1388 Statute is particularly relevant to its aims. In the wake of the Black Death, which wiped out almost forty percent of the English population in the mid-1300's, many ordinances, and specifically the Ordinance of 1349, attempted to limit wages for labourers seeking to capitalize on the decrease in the labour supply.[82] These ordinances aimed to stabilize, or restore, the prices of the pre-plague labour market. In contrast, the 1388 Statute followed not only the Black Death, but also events perhaps even more poignant in the English imagination. The Rising of 1381 involved a rebellion

[80] Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy', p. 219.
[81] *Ibid*, p. 226.
[82] R.B. Dobson, *The Peasants Revolt of 1381*, 2nd edit. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983).

in which peasants and landed gentry coordinated an organized strike taking control over parts of London, invading the Tower of London and ritualistically beheading the Lord Chancellor Archbishop Simon Sudbury.[83] The rising itself was infused with rhetoric from preachers like John Ball, whose theology and ability to organize caused many to fear that similar rebellions might be incited by the growing band of wandering Wycliffite preachers. The condemnation of certain Wycliffite theses at the Blackfriars Council of 1382, mere months after the 1381 rising, punctuates the way theology and politics are intimately linked during this period.[84] Given this context, Middleton explains that the aims of the 1388 Statute are directed not merely at curtailing the sorts of vagrancy that results from migrating labour populations, but specifically aims to curtail those wandering preachers whose ideas and rhetoric many feared would incite further rebellion.

It is against this backdrop that the wandering Will meets and is interrogated by Reason and Conscience, and it is in this context that Will's uncertainty about his communal and institutional identity, as displayed in the Prologue, comes uniquely into focus. Reason asks Will 'Can thow seruen', specifically through crafts related to bringing in the harvest, 'or eny other kynes craft that to the comune nedeth.'[85] Middleton points out that this is precisely the line of questioning one would expect from a local justice seeking to enforce the vagrancy Statute of 1388. If Will is found suspect, he is liable under the statute to be forced into labour in service to a ruling class claiming for itself the language of 'comune nedeth.'[86] The statute, however, makes exception for 'people of

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[83] Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* 2nd edit. (London: Routledge, 2003).
[84] Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[85] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.12, 20.
[86] Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy', pp. 216-8.

religion and hermits approved' and Will scrambles to defend himself in these terms.[87] Will describes himself as an itinerant married clerk in minor orders, traveling between London and the country sustaining himself and his family by begging and praying for the souls of those who help him.[88] This, however, is precisely the kind of person the vagrancy statute aimed to inhibit, as Middleton notes 'no justice in England would have released Will on his own recognizance and estimate as the interlocutors have.'[89]

What Middleton finds interesting is not necessarily why Conscience and Reason allow Will to go free, but the particular court of appeal to which Will, and so the poet, brings his defense:

> Of the two possible courts of appeal for fictively staging a defense of a legitimate, serious, and theologically adventurous vernacular poetics in the 1380s, Langland chose the secular venue in strategic preference to the ecclesiastical one, as by far the more promising for fantastic projection, and by far the more likely to concede its authority to a claim of scripturally informed vernacular conscience and calling – in short, more likely to accept, even if only by default, the verbal, citational, and sartorial trappings of *clergie* at face value.[90]

Middleton suggests that Will here uses the Statute as a screen, choosing to defend himself in the secular sphere by arguing that his life of mendicant prayer is a legitimate form of labour under the terms of the statute, rather than risk his case being investigated in an ecclesial court and being declared '*lollere*' for his adventurous and disruptive forays into

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[87] *Ibid*, p. 217.
[88] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.43-52. See E.T. Donaldson *Piers Plowman: The C-text and Its Poet* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949).
[89] Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy', p. 262.
[90] *Ibid,* p. 279.

vernacular theology.[91] That is to say, for Middleton, Will and so the poet chooses to veil the poem's theological work, as well as the lives behind it, as a genuine form of 'socially significant and spiritually valuable real work' in order to avoid ecclesial censure. As such, this moment reveals the way in which Will's identity and social location must find its way not only through the maze of ecclesial communities and personal anxiety, but also in relation to the increasingly defined operations of the state. More can be said about the theology and ecclesiology at play in this moment, but first it is worth considering what is at stake in Reason's initial charge that Will's is a 'lollarne lyf.'[92]

Just what exactly it meant to be called a '*lollare*', '*lollere*' or to be charged with living a '*lollerne life*' in the late 1300's is complicated.[93] It includes transformations of language and culture in late medieval England perhaps as unsettling as the transformations Langland describes around the language and practice of mendicancy and penance described above. As Middleton rightly argues, Reason's charge that Will's is a 'lollarne lyf' certainly operates against the backdrop of the politics of the 1388 Statute as a charge that Will's life is a wasteful avoidance of labour that might otherwise be directed towards the 'common good.' Thus, a portion of Will's self-defense includes his argument that his life of mendicant prayer is legitimate work, and not a wasteful 'lollarne lyf.' However, after the 1382 Blackfriars Council, the term 'lollere' assumed a more particular referent as it became a form of pejorative slang directed with increasing frequency against Wycliffites. Thus, Reason's charge against Will may not simply be a charge of laziness, but also include an heir of suspicion that Will might be a Wycliffite,

[91] Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', pp. p. 276, 279-80.
[92] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.31.
[93] While Middleton's work on the subject is certainly helpful, perhaps the most extensive treatment of the cultural and theological underpinnings of the term is to be found in Cole, *Literature and Heresy*.

perhaps one of those preachers like John Ball working to galvanize the peasants and incite a murderous uprising akin to the events of 1381.

Will's confession to these two figures does not, however, include a confession of errant theological positions or rebellious social activity, but rather the admission that,

> …Y beknowe
> That Y haue ytynt tyme and tyme myspened;
> Ac yut Y hope, as he that ofte hath ychaffared
> And ay loste and loste and at the laste hym happed
> A bouthe suche a bargain he was the bet euere
> And sette al his los at a leef at the laste ende,
> Suche a wynnyng hym warth thorw wyrdes of grace:
> *Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in argo.*
> *Mulier que inuenit dragmam.*
> So hope Y to haue of hym that is almighty
> A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
> That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne.[94]

Will's confession is for time wasted, and his hope is for a grace so abundant that it might sweep up all his time and turn it, transform it. Here, the poetry offers a sort of communion, a communion of biblical stories which offer parables depicting the excessive and inexhaustible nature of God's grace. By bringing his life into communion with these

[94] Langland, William *Piers Plowman*, V.92-101, ['…I must admit / That I have wasted time and time misspent; / But still, I hope, as he that has dealt often / And lost and lost, and at last happened / To buy such a bargain he was set up forever, / And counted his previous losses as not worth a leaf, / Such a winning came his way through words of grace. / *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field. The woman that found a silver coin, etc.* / So I hope to have from him that is almighty / A mouthful of his grace, and begin a time, / That all times of my time shall turn to profit'].

parables, Will's hope is given a particular shape as he longs for a grace capable of overpowering misspent time through the eternal God who redeems all time. What is particularly fascinating, and where Middleton's reading seems to stop short, is that Will does not await the fulfillment of this hope along the roadside where he has met Reason and Conscience. He does not wait for these justices to determine the legitimacy of his work. Instead, his act of confession spurs him to church,

> And to the kyrke Y gan go, god to honoure;
> Byfore the cross on my knees knokked Y my brest,
> Syhing for my synnes, seggyng my *pater-noster*,
> Wepyng and waylyng til Y was aslepe.[95]

How interesting for Will to speed his way to church immediately after choosing to defend himself on secular grounds out of fear of ecclesial censure! Not to mention his previously expressed anxieties concerning the pervasive corruptions of the church in the Prologue. Given what has gone before, it seems strange for Will to run to church. To further complicate the scene, Will does not puzzle over the particular community, whether it is a local parish, a group of Wycliffites, a band of mendicants, or a particular monastic house, in which he should offer his confession. He simply goes to 'the kyrke…god to honoure.' Here, the binary alternatives for Will as a 'lollere' (orthodox or heretic, lazy vagrant or good working citizen) seem to fade. What matters is his sincere act of confession and the particular context, or community, in which confession is performed, the church. Is this move merely a retreat to a sort of conservatism or abstract idealic ecclesiology? At this point, it remains unclear. The details around the continuation of Will's return to church,

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[95] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.105-108, [And so to church I went to honor God, / Kneeling before the cross I beat my breast, / Sighing for my sins, saying my *pater noster,* / Weeping and wailing till I fell asleep].

its practices and the potential renewal of his life-long journey of faith are again interrupted as Will falls asleep. Much can, and in later chapters will, be said about Will's vision of the seven deadly sins; but for present purposes the focus remains on one final aspect of this scene.

As one of the final major editions to the poem, this section of Passus V in the poem's last version is particularly revealing of the poet's reflections about the nature and shape of his work. Middleton suggests that this addition inserted at this particular moment in the narrative sequence,

> Retrospectively asserts the poem's immanent and intentional design, rather than its episodically fortuitous and merely additive character, as a long-term and large-scale *literary* enterprise. In the process this declaration also has the effect of rendering explicit and problematic the poem's double social and cognitive 'mode of existence' in its historical world, as a fixed textual object (in fact a series of them), which may in theory be assimilated by the mind as a whole, and contemplated and reflectively elaborated as a single intent and narrative, yet produced and disseminated as a continuing and never-ending reiteration, a kind of liturgical performance, of an act from which the actor is, in the nature of the case, never fully free, a work of which the maker can never take his leave, as a book he can never close. … in other words, a continuous 'work' that has in effect become a 'life' rather than an assemblage of 'makings.'[96]

Middleton's assessment is helpful, even poetic. It also leaves certain questions hanging. Specifically, is Langland, like Will, intentionally testing the limits of orthodoxy through a daring and ongoing work of vernacular theology behind a veil of secular labour? If the

[96] Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy', p. 273.

resonances between this scene and the 1388 Statute are indeed a functional screen to ground *Piers Plowman* in the secular rather than the ecclesial realm of judgment, it might be wondered whether *Piers Plowman* is related to social or ecclesial revolution akin to the 1381 rising, or whether this is an instance of the poet back-peddling from the radical revolutionary potential of this making towards a more modest conservative reformism.[97] Amidst all of the dreamer's anxieties about the corruption of the church, as well as his confusion regarding his social and ecclesial identity, what it means for Will to participate in such a work, and whether reform or revolution are the only two alternatives, are valid questions. So too the significance of Will's continual return to the church, its community and practices: is this a retreat to an abstract ideal or a gesture towards an unwillingness to abandon the late medieval church? Will's final waking moment offers a powerful location for the poet to bring together themes related to communal and institutional identity as they relate to theological and literary traditions of self-knowing and also the historical realities of late-medieval Christianity and culture. As such, Will's wandering in the field of the world and his search for salvation are tangled up with a church that is itself mixed in with certain coercive powers of the state. This state, as has been shown, concerns itself with the content of theological work. How Langland portrays this church which Will runs to for prayer and confession is an important subject to address.

§ Langland's ecclesial vision: a first glance

In the final passus, Will awakes after an extraordinary sequence including allegorical visions of faith, hope and love; the life, death and resurrection of Christ; as

[97] A common suggestion, see G.R. Owst *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933).

well as Pentecost, the formation of the church and the contradictions this new community endures on earth. In the wake of this powerful series of visions, the theological, social and self-reflexive puzzles of Will's wanderings are powerfully expressed through the opening verse of this final passus,

And as Y wente by the way, when Y was thus awaked,
Heuy-chered Y yede and elyng in herte,
For Y ne wiste where to ete ne at what place.[98]

Will wakes here at the opening of the poem's final passus after, in the penultimate passus, nodding off to sleep during the offertory at the moment prior to the consecration of the mass. Thus, his confusion about where to eat includes a Eucharistic pun, Will should have just received the sacramental body and blood of Christ. He should have just eaten, and specifically, he should have just eaten in church.

But, in Passus XXII, Will is again wandering, accosted by yet another figure for being a 'faytour' and returns to all his uncertainties about his identity in relation to his social and ecclesial status. Will recapitulates his life of wandering, the abuse he endures at the hands of manipulative friars, his struggles in old age and the anxiety he experiences in the face of death. Looking into the void of death, Will cries out to Kynde,

…'Out of care me brynge!
'Lo! how Elde the hore hath me byseye;
Awreke me, yif youre wille be, for Y wolde be hennes.'
'Yf thow wolt be wreke, wende into Vnite
And halde the there euere til Y sende for the.

[98] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.1-3, [And as I went on my way after I awoke, / Sad-faced I walked and aching at heart, / For I didn't know where or at what place I could eat.].

And loke thow conne som craft ar thow come thennes.'

'Consaileth me, Kynde,' quod Y, 'what craft be beste to lere?'

'Lerne to loue,' quod Kynde, 'and leef all othere.'

'How shal Y come to catel so, to clothe me and to fede?'

'And thow loue lelly, lacke shal the neuere

Wede ne worldly mete while thy lif lasteth.'

And Y bi conseil of Kynde comsed to rome

Thorw contricion and confessioun til Y cam to Vnite.[99]

This Will, life-weary and uncertain about both his identity and the communities that might help him on his journey towards God, is commanded and submits to return to the very church he sees crumbling from within. If David Aers' suggestion that Langland's use of 'rome' includes both the sense of 'to roam' and the 'Roman church', then Will's obedience includes a sort of double consciousness of suspicion and dependence as he returns to the liturgy, patterns and common life of late medieval Christianity.[100] Such a split-minded return to the pattern and language of late medieval Christianity is gestured to by the very structure of the poem, which is itself shaped around the liturgy.[101] While Will submits to end his days learning the craft of love within Holy Church, Vnity, the poem famously concludes with Conscience departing the church, perhaps punctuating

[99] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.201-13, […to bring me out of care: / 'Look, how hoary Old Age has treated me; / Avenge me, if you will, I want out of here.' / 'If you want revenge, make your way into Unity / And keep yourself there till I send for you, / And make sure you learn some craft before you come from there.' / 'Counsel me, Kind,' I said, 'what craft's best to learn?' / 'Learn to love,' said Kind, 'and forget all the rest.' / 'How shall I earn a living, to clothe and feed myself?' / 'If you love loyally, you'll never lack / Clothes or earthly food as long as you live.' / And according to Kind's advice I began to roam / Through Contrition and Confession till I came to Unity.].

[100] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004), p. 155.

[101] See Robert Adams, 'Langland and the Liturgy Revisited' *Studies in Philology*, 73 (1976), pp. 266-84; Conor McKee, 'Pedagogic and Dramatic Roles of the Liturgy in *Piers Plowman'*, *The Cambridge Quarterly Review*, 45 (2016), pp. 343-64.

those voices in the poem who represent Langland's tempered sympathy for Wycliffites as representatives of a more authentic form of discipleship than their clerical, hermetic or Franciscan counterparts.[102] Either way, at the poem's close, the tensions between individual and communal identity are heightened, not resolved, and if Middleton is correct that the addition to Passus V in the C-version is one of the latest amendments to the work, then it is clear that Langland made no effort to resolve these tensions in his final redaction.

In response to these tensions, Walter W. Skeat long ago maintained,

> What other ending could there be? or rather, the end is not yet. We may be defeated, yet not cast down; we may be dying, and behold, we live. We are all still pilgrims upon earth. *This* is the truth which the author's mighty genius would impress upon us in his parting words. Just as the poet awakes in ecstasy at the end of the poem of Dobet, where he dreams of that which has been already accomplished, so here he is awoke by the cry of Conscience for help, and is silent at the thought of how much remains to be done. So far from ending carelessly, he seems to me to have ceased speaking at the right moment, and to have managed a very difficult matter with consummate skill.[103]

Skeat is here prosaic and not inaccurate. However, these tensions around individual and communal identity and the self that Langland holds throughout *Piers Plowman* involve a more particular theological concern than has often been credited to the poem. Langland's work maintains certain tensions as necessary for the investigation of the following

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[102] Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer*.
[103] Walter W. Skeat, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman together with Richard the Redeless*, vol. 2 (of 2) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886), pp. 285-6.

puzzle: how do pilgrims, faced with rival communities wielding competing and irreconcilable claims to the teaching authority of the church, negotiate rival claims and communities without spiraling into infinite spirals of individualistic regress? This question is not merely epistemological, but is inseparable from the communities, institutions and cultural practices that shape the architecture, control and dissemination of knowledge in late medieval English society.

§ The 'self' and the church in the thought of Thomas Aquinas

To further demonstrate the particular aptitude *Piers Plowman* offers to an investigation of selfhood, this analysis now considers the particular way Langland's poetry engages and questions both the theological *and* institutional development of doctrine in the late-medieval church. Specifically, Langland's poetry examines key elements of Thomas Aquinas' theological account of the church's teaching authority alongside critiques within Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale.*

The questions Langland raises, questions derived from the opacity of the subject and the possibility that such an unknowing self precludes the subject from carrying out a journey, are completely alien to the theological perspective of Langland's near contemporary Thomas Aquinas.[104] Aquinas is not troubled by questions of the unknown

[104] While comparing Chaucer and Langland's representations of tensions concerning the church's teaching authority need little justification, the relation between Langland and Thomas Aquinas requires more attention. Appreciation for Thomas' theological insights in England and in the period immediately preceding and following the production of *Piers Plowman* is wide. The interpretive space concerning Thomas' work between March 7, 1277 and his canonization by Pope John XXII in 1323 is further complicated in England by Robert Kilwardby's, then Archbishop of Oxford, condemnations of Thomistically inspired theses on March 18, 1277 and his successor, John Pecham's renewal of those condemnations a decade later. Not to mention William de la Mare's Catalgue (*Correctorium*) of 118 Thomistic theses deemed dangerous and attached to Thomas' works in the schools. For a detailed history of this see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P. *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 86-90; David

self in the way Langland depicts the problem in the opening lines of his poem. For Aquinas, the question of authority is bound up with trust, or faith. It is also a development of Augustine's theological epistemology as described in his *De utilitate credendi* previously considered.

In the first question of the *secunda secundae* of his *Summa Theologiae,* Thomas explores faith and the relationship faith ultimately has to received authority and the carrying on of a tradition. For Thomas, questions related to authority, and specifically claims to the church's teaching office, are bound up with the concept of faith and how faith is received by, and also forms, the soul. Thomas crafts a series of distinctions designed to demonstrate the justifiability, indeed the necessity, of assent to divine teaching offered through the mediation of the church's authorities. The all-important theological shift Thomas brings to these questions around authority and the self is that Thomas does not ground assent to authority either in the trustworthiness of the subject or

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Piche, *La Condamnation parisienne de 1277: translation, introduction et commentaire* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), Edward Grant, 'The effect of the Condemnation of 1277' in Norman Kretzmann, ed., *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 537-9; Étienne Gilson *A History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1953), p. 406. While it is certainly reasonable to suggest that acceptance of Thomas' theology was neither universal nor widespread in England during the period of Langland's education and writing, the flurry of interest around the angelic doctor during the mid-fourteenth century, and particularly in England, make it likely that Langland would have engaged either Thomas directly, or at least through figures working to refute Thomas' positions. Indeed, Langland's contemporary, regional neighbor and potential fellow Augustinian Canon Walter Hilton, in his *Epistola de Utilitate*, names Thomas Aquinas as a special authority on the religious life, see John P.H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward, 'Introduction' in *Walter Hilton: The Scale of Perfection* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 22-4, 32-3. Thomas's theology around faith and the church's teaching authority is examined at length here because it is uniquely articulate. The present chapter will demonstrate the ways many church authorities in England during Langland's time will use (manipulate) some of Thomas' conclusions to enforce and maintain their power. As such, it is remarkable that *Piers Plowman* not only challenges certain abuses to claims of ecclesial authority, but also goes further to question the very philosophical and theological scaffolding upon which these claims depend. Langland here resonates with certain Wycliffite writings, see *Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight* in *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* ed. Fiona Somerset. *The Early English Text Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Whether Langland is doing so as an intentional or direct engagement with Thomas is inconsequential to the chapter's argument. What is important is the way *Piers Plowman* problematizes the propositions that make Aquinas' teachings on ecclesial authority possible, and specifically the mode of reasoning and linguistic discourse he forms through his poetry as an alternative against contemporary theological and political abuses.

in appeal to human authority as such. Rather Thomas thinks through the relation between faith and authority in a way which presupposes that the very *obiectum* of faith itself is God.[105] Furthermore, for Thomas, this same God choses to mediate God's self to humanity through mystical unions of human and divine agency, specifically the Incarnation and also the Church. Thomas is interested in exploring the degree to which the concept of received authority itself is fitting only if the *obiectum* of faith, or trust, is the God who is the Creator, Sustainer and End of all things; the same God who choses to enter into the finitude of human existence through both the Incarnation and the church as the divinely elected means through which God mediates God's self to God's beloved.

T.C. O'Brien helpfully clarifies the meaning behind Thomas' language of *obiectum*, pointing out that, 'The term [*obiectum*] 'object' stands for the reality, thing or person, that engages an act.'[106] Going further, Rienhard Hutter notes that, 'What needs to be highlighted is the verb 'engage.''[107] For Thomas, the God who is the First Truth is the *obiectum* of faith in two ways.[108] First, as the formal principle. As the formal principle of faith, God is the one who engages, God is the One who acts. As the formal principle, God makes it possible for the material objects to be known analogous to the way the formal principles of geometry are the means of demonstration that make the conclusions, that

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[105] The critical edition for the *Summae theolgiae* used here is the Leonine edition, *Corpus Thomisticum, Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Summa Theologiae*, Leonine edition (Rome, 1888), https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth0000.html, which is cited following the usual conventions for Aquinas's works, with the abbreviation ST, here, ST IIa-IIae q. 1. Modern English translations provided, unless otherwise stated, are taken from *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica* 5 vols. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948).
[106] T.C O'Brien, O.P. 'Appendix 1: Objects and Virtues', in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*. Vol. 31 *Faith* (*2a2ae 1-7*), English translation, introduction, notes, appendices and glossary by T.C. O'Brien. Reprint of the 1974 original edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 178.
[107] Reinhard Hutter, 'Theological Faith Enlightening Sacred Theology: Renewing Theology by Recovering Its Unity as *Sacra Doctrina'*, *The Thomist* (2010), p. 369-405.
[108] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 1.1.

which is known materially, knowable.[109] To follow the contours of this analogy, God is both the primary target and the primary agent Who makes God's self knowable. Thomas also insists that God is the *obiectum* of faith in a second way, and again he uses an analogy. Seemingly diverse and unconnected particulars like 'Christ's human nature, the sacraments of the church, *or any creatures whatever*, come under faith in so far as by them we are directed to God.'[110] For Thomas, all creation comes into being *ex nihilo* through God and is ordered towards God, and thus even the diverse particulars of creation are contained under God Who is the *obiectum* of faith analogous to the way 'the object of the medical art is health, for it considers nothing save in relation to health.'[111] Faith, or trust, for Thomas is thus not the act of an independent deliberating subject assenting to an object that is extrinsic or uninvolved in the processes of its being known. Nor is faith the result of *ad hoc* or utterly disconnected elements randomly constructing a purely contingent way of discerning the relation between God and creation. God, for Thomas, is the *obiectum* of faith, the *obiectum* through which all creation comes into being and to which all creation is eventually ordered, in such a way that God is intimately bound up in the very act of the subject's assent and knowing.

This active, engaging, aspect of God Who is the *obiectum* of faith becomes more apparent as Thomas distinguishes how the human subject, particularly the intellect, assents. For Thomas, faith is to think with assent in a particular way,

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[109] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 1.1.
[110] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 1.1.ad.1, [Ad primum ergo dicendum quod ea quae pertinent ad humanitatem Christi et ad sacramenta Ecclesiae vel ad quascumque creaturas cadunt sub fide inquantum per haec ordinamur ad Deum. Et eis etiam assentimus propter divinam veritatem.].
[111] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 1.1.co, […sicut etiam obiectum medicinae est sanitas, quia nihil medicina considerat nisi in ordine ad sanitatem.].

> To think is more strictly taken for that consideration of the intellect, which is accompanied by some kind of inquiry, and which precedes the intellect's arrival at the stage of perfection that comes with the certitude of sight.[112]

Again, Thomas chooses to explicate this description by way of an analogy, this time through an analogy borrowed from Augustine,

> The Son of God is not called the Thought, but the Word of God. When our thought realizes what we know and takes form therefrom, it becomes our word. Hence the Word of God must be understood without any thinking on the part of God, for there is nothing there that can take form, or be unformed.[113]

Thus thinking is that inchoate activity which occurs prior to our utterance in word, or to use another analogy, that straining towards vision that occurs prior to sight. So, faith is a sort of thinking, in this inchoate mode, with assent, or 'the movement of the mind while yet deliberating, and not yet perfected by the clear sight of truth.'[114] 'If […] *to think* be understood in [this] second way, then this expresses completely the nature of the act of believing.'[115] As such, the act of faith exists in the space between opinion and *scientia.*[116] It is a mode of knowing the unknown that is warranted, indeed fitting, precisely because the identity of the *obiectum* is God, and it is thus a mode of knowing the Infinite Creator

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[112] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 2.1.co, [Alio modo dicitur cogitare magis proprie consideratio intellectus quae est cum quadam inquisitione, antequam perveniatur ad perfectionem intellectus per certitudinem visionis.].
[113] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 2.1.co*,* ['Cogitatio quippe nostra proveniens ad id quod scimus atque inde formata verbum nostrum verum est. Et ideo verbum Dei sine cogitatione debet intelligi, non aliquid habens formabile, quod possit esse informe.].
[114] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 2.1.co*,* ['Et secundum hoc cogitatio proprie dicitur motus animi deliberantis nondum perfecti per plenam visionem veritatis].
[115] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q. 2.1.co*.,* IIa-IIae q. 1.co, ['Si igitur cogitare sumatur communiter, secundum primum modum, sic hoc quod dicitur cum assensione cogitare non dicit totam rationem eius quod est credere.].
[116] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.4.1.co.

of all that is most appropriate in light of the limitations of the creature.[117] Consequently, the subject is brought to belief by way of engagement by and with the *obiectum* of faith. It is a sort of ongoing interaction initiated by the God who is unseen[118], Who also stirs the will towards the inchoate presentation of the *obiectum* offered by the intellect.[119] Assent, therefore, is an activity that cannot be isolated to the internal or external action of the subject, but rather includes the very processes through which the subject is swept up into a life of participation in the One Who is believed.

Thomas further investigates the interrelation of the processes constitutive of the act of faith by clarifying how faith is best understood not simply as an act, but as a virtue. For Thomas, human virtue 'denotes a certain perfection of a power', a certain character formed and established within the soul which disposes a person to act in a certain way, a *habitus.*[120] On the one hand, the virtues are distinguished regarding their ends; the moral virtues concern the formation of the will, while the intellectual virtues form the mind, both of which are united through the virtue of prudence. On the other hand, the virtues are also distinguished according to human capacity,

> Both intellectual and moral virtues are in us by nature, so far as we are adapted to them, but not in their perfection…both intellectual and moral virtues are in us by way

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[117] Avery Dulles helpfully clarifies the significance and puzzle that God, and not merely things about God, is the *obiectum* of faith, 'After explaining that faith is one and undivided in its content (since all truth is one in the divine mind), [Thomas Aquinas] points out that the human mind, unable to take in the entire content of faith in a single act, divides that content into articles. But the articles or propositions, he explains, are not, strictly speaking, the objects of faith 'for the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition (*enuntiable*) but in the reality [signified by the proposition]; for we do not form propositions except to have knowledge of things by means of them, whether in science or in faith (*S. Th.*,2-2.1.2, ad2).'

[118] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.4.co. On the significance of apophatic theology in Thomas' thought (specifically the unknowability of the divine essence this side of the eschaton) see Joseph Pieper *The Silence of St. Thomas* (St. Augustine Press, 1999).

[119] Aquinas, ST Ia-IIae q.9.1.co and IIa-IIae q.1.10.ad.4. Or as Thomas will later describe it, 'Actus autem fidei est credere, qui, sicut supra dictum est, actus est intellectus determinati ad unum ex imperio voluntatis' (Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.4.1.co).

[120] Aquinas, ST Ia-IIae q.55.1.co.

> of a natural aptitude, inchoatively, – but not perfectly, since nature is determined to one, while the perfection of these virtues does not depend on one particular mode of action, but on various modes, in respect of the various matters, which constitute the sphere of virtue's action, and according to various circumstances.
>
> It is therefore evident that all virtues are in us by nature, according to aptitude and inchoation, but not according to perfection, except the theological virtues which are entirely from without.[121]

Thus, for Thomas, there are certain virtues which are natural[122] to human beings in an inchoative or imperfect mode, and these virtues develop in a person as that person acquires habits conducive to a virtue's formation, or perfection, in the soul. The theological virtues are different. The theological virtues, of which faith is one, are infused 'entirely from without' in a person by God. A person cannot even prepare her will for the infusion of faith, 'To believe does indeed depend on the will of the believer: but [a person's] will needs to be prepared by God with grace, in order that [she] may be raised to things which are above [her] nature.'[123] Thus faith, for Thomas, is a theological virtue infused in a person by God, an act in response to the subject's being engaged by the very

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[121] Aquinas, ST Ia-IIae q.63.1.co, [Et his modis tam virtutes intellectuales quam morales, secundum quandam aptitudinis inchoationem, sunt in nobis a natura. Non autem consummatio earum. Quia natura determinatur ad unum, consummatio autem huiusmodi virtutum non est secundum unum modum actionis, sed diversimode, secundum diversas materias in quibus virtutes operantur, et secundum diversas circumstantias. Sic ergo patet quod virtutes in nobis sunt a natura secundum aptitudinem et inchoationem, non autem secundum perfectionem, praeter virtutes theologicas, quae sunt totaliter ab extrinseco]. See also Aquinas, ST Ia-IIae q.61.

[122] It is important to bear in mind that 'natural' in this context does *not* infer a mode of existence that is not the result of and sustained by the creative act of God. For Thomas, there is not such thing as a 'natural' mode of existence that is distinctively human in a way that is untouched and not indebted to God for its existence. For an excellent account of this, see Henri de Lubac's *The Mystery of the Supernatural* trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012).

[123] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.6.1.ad.3, ['Ad tertium dicendum quod credere quidem in voluntate credentium consistit, sed oportet quod voluntas hominis praeparetur a Deo per gratiam ad hoc quod elevetur in ea quae sunt supra naturam, ut supra dictum est].

obiectum of faith.[124] For Thomas, that God is both the *obiectum* and the primary agent in the human act of faith is a critical commitment of Catholic teaching which is necessary to avoid the error of the Pelagian heresy,

> The Pelagians held that this cause [of faith] was nothing else than man's free-will: and consequently they said that the beginning of faith is from ourselves, inasmuch as, to wit, it is in our power to be ready to assent to things which are of faith, but that the consummation of faith is from God, Who proposes to us the things we have to believe. But this is false, for, since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly: and this is God. Therefore, faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man outwardly by grace.[125]

To be clear, as an infused virtue, Thomas does not hold the act of faith to be a violent act of God upon a wholly passive human subject. Faith is entirely a gift, and yet a person grows in the gift of faith as they participate more and more in the God-given virtue through which they learn the truths of faith more explicitly.[126] Thus, while faith is an

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[124] That faith is a virtue, see Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.4.5.co, 'Unde quicumque habitus est semper principium boni actus, potest dici virtus humana. Talis autem habitus est fides formata. Cum enim credere sit actus intellectus assentientis vero ex imperio voluntatis, ad hoc quod iste actus sit perfectus duo requiruntur. Quorum unum est ut infallibiliter intellectus tendat in suum bonum, quod est verum, aliud autem est ut infallibiliter ordinetur ad ultimum finem, propter quem voluntas assentit vero. Et utrumque invenitur in actu fidei formatae. Nam ex ratione ipsius fidei est quod intellectus semper feratur in verum, quia fidei non potest subesse falsum, ut supra habitum est, ex caritate autem, quae format fidem, habet anima quod infallibiliter voluntas ordinetur in bonum finem. Et ideo fides formata est virtus.' That faith is a theological virtue, see ST Ia-IIae q.62. That faith is an infused virtue, see ST Ia-IIae q.6.1.

[125] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.6.1.co, ['Hanc autem causam Pelagiani ponebant solum liberum arbitrium hominis, et propter hoc dicebant quod initium fidei est ex nobis, inquantum scilicet ex nobis est quod parati sumus ad assentiendum his quae sunt fidei; sed consummatio fidei est a Deo, per quem nobis proponuntur ea quae credere debemus. Sed hoc est falsum. Quia cum homo, assentiendo his quae sunt fidei, elevetur supra naturam suam, oportet quod hoc insit ei ex supernaturali principio interius movente, quod est Deus. Et ideo fides quantum ad assensum, qui est principalis actus fidei, est a Deo interius movente per gratiam.]. Another excellent explication of the relation between divine and human agency in the processes and movements of human will can be found in Thomas' account of the necessity of grace in ST Ia-IIae q.109.

[126] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.5.4.co.

infused virtue, it is infused in a way that is only intelligible for Thomas insofar as faith functions as a human act that is perfected through human participation in it as a gift from God. The theological virtues are not infused perfectly or completely in a person, but in form. Thus, faith, like hope and charity, requires the God-enabled participation of the recipient in order for the form of particular theological virtues to move a person towards perfection.[127]

Following his study of the *obiectum* of faith, Thomas turns his attention to how the tradition of faith in the unseen God passes on through time. That is to say, Thomas moves from considering how a person believes (*fides qua*), to an analysis of the how the church negotiates its own authority to teach and form the faithful across time (*fides quae*). He concludes that the best means for Christianity to be passed on is through an ecclesially mediated 'collection of maxims of faith' united under a 'symbol.'[128] One of the primary reasons Thomas deems this necessary is because,

> The truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely, so that, in order to gather the truth of faith from Holy Writ, one needs long study and practice, which are unattainable by all those who require to know the truth of faith, many of whom have no time for study, being busy with other affairs. And so it was necessary to gather together a clear summary from the sayings of Holy Writ, to be proposed to the belief of all. This indeed was no addition to Holy Writ, but something taken from it.[129]

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[127] The participation of the human will in the God-initiated act/virtue of faith is also integral to the way in which Thomas holds the act of faith to be meritorious. See Joseph Wawykrow *God's Grace and Human Action: 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995).
[128] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.co.
[129] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.ad.1, ['Ad primum ergo dicendum quod veritas fidei in sacra Scriptura diffuse continetur et variis modis, et in quibusdam obscure; ita quod ad eliciendum fidei veritatem ex sacra Scriptura requiritur longum studium et exercitium, ad quod non possunt pervenire omnes illi quibus

What Thomas implies here by 'symbols' are, of course, the various creeds. He affirms that multiple creeds are appropriate insofar as different creeds combat diverse errors brought by heretics over time.[130] Here, two things become immediately apparent. First, that it is fitting and necessary for the complexity of Holy Writ and truths pertaining to God to be made sufficiently available to all members of the church given the diversity of functions each member of the body offers and the limitations such diverse stations place on the time different members have for study. The second aspect of the importance of symbols is the appropriateness of multiple symbols. Here, Thomas acknowledges that the faith of the church is not a static set of propositions, but a 'living faith'[131] and thus the church must constantly offer symbols of the faith to combat new errors that arise in changing historical circumstances. Yet, for Thomas, it is also the case that new symbols are not strictly born out of responses to error.

The church develops new symbols as it discerns certain articles of the faith which, up until particular moments in history, are only believed implicitly,

> We must conclude that, as regards the substance of the articles of faith they have not received any increase as time went on: since whatever those who lived later have believed, was contained, albeit implicitly in the faith of those Fathers who preceded them. But there was an increase in the number of articles believed explicitly which were not known explicitly by those who lived before them.[132]

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necessarium est cognoscere fidei veritatem, quorum plerique, aliis negotiis occupati, studio vacare non possunt. Et ideo fuit necessarium ut ex sententiis sacrae Scripturae aliquid manifestum summarie colligeretur quod proponeretur omnibus ad credendum. Quod quidem non est additum sacrae Scripturae, sed potius ex sacra Scriptura assumptum.].

[130] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.ad.2.

[131] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.ad.3.

[132] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.7.co, [' Sic igitur dicendum est quod, quantum ad substantiam articulorum fidei, non est factum eorum augmentum per temporum successionem, quia quaecumque posteriores crediderunt continebantur in fide praecedentium patrum, licet implicite. Sed quantum ad explicationem,

Indeed, Thomas explains that the article of faith affirming that the transubstantiated substance of Christ's body and blood are contained under the accidents of the material bread and wine in the Eucharist is an article of faith believed implicitly under the previously affirmed article of faith in God's omniscience, and yet only believed explicitly later in the church's history, determinatively at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.[133]

The task of making more explicit the deposit of faith, or as John Henry Newman would call it centuries later 'discerning the development of doctrine', is an authority Thomas grants to,

> the universal Church [which] cannot err, since it is governed by the Holy Ghost, Who is the Spirit of truth: for such was our Lord's promise to His disciples. … Now the symbol is published by the authority of the universal Church. Therefore it contains nothing defective.[134]

And this responsibility, the right interpretation of the deposit of faith, is bestowed, for Thomas, upon the Supreme Pontiff, the Pope,

> Consequently it belongs to the sole authority of the Sovereign Pontiff to publish a new edition of the symbol, as do all other matters which concern the whole Church, such as to convoke a general council and so forth.[135]

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crevit numerus articulorum, quia quaedam explicite cognita sunt a posterioribus quae a prioribus non cognoscebantur explicite].

[133] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.8.ad.6. For an excellent history of the development of church teaching around the Eucharistic see Henri de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ (London: SCM Press, 2006).

[134] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.sc, ['Ecclesia universalis non potest errare, quia spiritu sancto gubernatur, qui est spiritus veritatis, hoc enim promisit dominus discipulis, Ioan. XVI, dicens, cum venerit ille spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem. Sed symbolum est auctoritate universalis Ecclesiae editum. Nihil ergo inconveniens in eo continetur'].

[135] Aquinas, ST IIa.IIae q.1.10.co, ['Et ideo ad solam auctoritatem summi pontificis pertinet nova editio symboli, sicut et omnia alia quae pertinent ad totam Ecclesiam, ut congregare synodum generalem et alia huiusmodi].

Thomas further clarifies that this authority which the Supreme Pontiff bears is not equivalent to either individual judgment or novelty, but is rather bound up in a history of councils and creeds which all work together to proclaim 'the same faith with greater explicitness' rather than a new faith with each historically conditioned symbol.[136] For Thomas, this trust in the authority of the church to mediate divine truths is itself an article of faith,

> If we say: "In" the holy Catholic Church, this must be taken as verified in so far as our faith is directed to the Holy Ghost, Who sanctifies the Church; so that the sense is: I believe in the Holy Ghost sanctifying the Church.[137]

For Thomas, trusting the church to faithfully interpret and pass on the development of doctrine derived from revelation is bound up with believing that the Holy Spirit is active in the community of the faithful. Believing in the church's authority is thus constitutive with believing in God the Holy Spirit.

Thomas' commitment to the necessity of faith in the church's teaching authority is as theological as it is political. Theologically, for Thomas, assent to the church's teaching authority is necessary in order for members of Christ's body to discipline themselves against the root of heresy, obstinate adherence to private judgment, or

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[136] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.10.ad.1.
[137] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.1.9.ad.5, ['si dicatur in sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam, est hoc intelligendum secundum quod fides nostra refertur ad spiritum sanctum, qui sanctificat Ecclesiam, ut sit sensus, credo in spiritum sanctum sanctificantem Ecclesiam].

individual will, over and against the discernment of the church.[138] The faith of the church, for Thomas, must be received wholly,

> Neither living nor lifeless faith remains in a heretic who disbelieves one article of faith…faith adheres to all the articles of faith by reason of one mean, […], according to the teaching of the Church who has the right understanding of them. Hence whoever abandons this mean is altogether lacking in faith.[139]

For Thomas, assenting to the whole, and not only certain parts, of the articles of faith determined by the church is the only way to avoid the infinitely regressive spirals of self-referential individualism which lie at the root of heresy.[140] This is because, for Thomas, pilgrims either assent to the church, established by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, or their own individual will,

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[138] From the Enlightenment through modernity, privileging private judgment over submission to received authority by faith, becomes a virtue. Charles Taylor argues that Rene Descartes stands as a seminal voice in this epistemological shift, in whose writing the individual, rather than mediated engagement with and by God, becomes determinative for human epistemology, 'What has happened [in Cartesian epistemology] is rather that God's existence has become a stage in *my* progress towards science through methodical ordering of evident insight. God's existence is a theorem in *my* system of perfect science. The center of gravity has decisively shifted' in *Sources of the Self*, p. 157. Taylor is not the first to incriminate Cartesian epistemology. Etienne Gilson makes this argument explicitly in his 1931-1932 Gifford Lectures published in 1936 as *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* trans. by A. H. C. Downes (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1936, 1991, 2007) especially chapters 11-13. Gilson's student, Armand Maurer takes this way of contrasting medieval philosophy from modern philosophy in his thorough study *Medieval Philosophy* (New York NY: Random House Publishing, 1962) p. xiii, 'Medieval philosophy came to an end when the conditions that had brought it about ceased to exist. Born of the confluence of the early Christian faith with the philosophical traditions of the Greeks, it was bound to die when Christians of a later day decided that philosophy should again be cultivated for its own sake, apart from theology and independent of revelation. Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes were primarily responsible for that epoch-making decision, which is considered to make the birth of 'modern philosophy'.'

[139] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.5.3.co and ad.2, ['Respondeo dicendum quod haereticus qui discredit unum articulum fidei non habet habitum fidei neque formatae neque informis… Sed omnibus articulis fidei inhaeret fides propter unum medium, scilicet propter veritatem primam propositam nobis in Scripturis secundum doctrinam Ecclesiae intellectis sane. Et ideo qui ab hoc medio decidit totaliter fide caret].

[140] For an excellent attempt to narrate the history of how this 'root of heresy' becomes the foundation of 'modern epistemology' see Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). Dupre's project 'investigate[s] the origins, processes, and the effects of this double breakup: the one between the transcendent constituent and its cosmic-human counterpart, and the one between the person and cosmos (now understood in the narrower sense of physical nature). The two combined caused the ontotheological synthesis that had guided Western thought to break down' (p. 3).

> Now it is manifest that he who adheres to the teaching of the Church, as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, of the things taught by the Church, he holds what he chooses to hold, and rejects what he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as an infallible rule, but to his own will. Hence it is evident that a heretic who obstinately disbelieves one article of faith, is not prepared to follow the teaching of the Church in all things; but if he is not obstinate, he is no longer in heresy but only in error. Therefore it is clear that such a heretic with regard to one article has no faith in other articles, but only a kind of opinion in accordance with his own will.[141]

For Thomas, whole-sale adherence to the teaching authority of the Church which cannot err is absolutely necessary. And this complete acceptance, so Thomas argues, is in fact the only epistemological mitigation available to human beings whose sin and ignorance would otherwise tempt them towards the illusion that they can be gods unto themselves. Such errors stem from withholding assent in matters of faith and authority based upon the determination of their own private judgment, rather than the teaching of the community established by Christ actively sanctified through the Holy Spirit.[142]

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[141] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.5.3.co, ['Manifestum est autem quod ille qui inhaeret doctrinae Ecclesiae tanquam infallibili regulae, omnibus assentit quae Ecclesia docet. Alioquin, si de his quae Ecclesia docet quae vult tenet et quae vult non tenet, non iam inhaeret Ecclesiae doctrinae sicut infallibili regulae, sed propriae voluntati. Et sic manifestum est quod haereticus qui pertinaciter discredit unum articulum non est paratus sequi in omnibus doctrinam Ecclesiae (si enim non pertinaciter, iam non est haereticus, sed solum errans). Unde manifestum est quod talis haereticus circa unum articulum fidem non habet de aliis articulis, sed opinionem quandam secundum propriam voluntatem].

[142] Rejecting the teaching of the church, so Aquinas argues, damns the obstinate to a maze insofar as the ultimate determination of all truth and action is no longer, in the manner of Thomas, grounded in the reality of God Who has created and ordered the universe to Himself. Instead, the ground of all good thought and action is located within individual selves, selves who insofar as human beings are finite cannot help but dissolve into chaotic cobbles of fragmentation and contradiction. Without the possibility of trusting in God as the *obiectum* of faith, human reasoning is trapped within an infinite series of self-contradicting selves unable to order their lives toward any sort of common good, much less common acceptance of authority. This is the argument, or story, Alasdair MacIntyre makes/tells in his seminal work *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Thomas envisions the passing on of the articles of faith through the development of symbols discerned through the church's teaching authority by way of an ordered hierarchical series of relations mediating Divine revelation.

> Now Divine revelation reaches those of lower degree through those who are over them, in a certain order; to men, for instance, through the angels, and to the lower angels through the higher, as Dionysius explains (*Coel. Hier.* iv, vii). In like manner, therefore, the unfolding of faith must needs reach men of lower degree through those of higher degree.[143]

Indeed, Thomas is so committed to the hierarchical dissemination of Divine revelation that he is even willing to insist that it is sufficient for the salvation of the majority to have implicit faith and to be led by those of 'higher degree' whose faith in the various articles and symbols of faith is explicit.[144] This view, Thomas acknowledges, appears to present a danger,

> If the simple are bound to have, not explicit but only implicit faith, their faith must need be implied in the faith of the learned. But this seems unsafe, since it is possible for the learned to err. Therefore it seems that the simple should also have explicit faith; so that all are, therefore, equally bound to have explicit faith.[145]

To this objection, Thomas replies,

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[143] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.2.6.co, ['Revelatio autem divina ordine quodam ad inferiores pervenit per superiores, sicut ad homines per Angelos, et ad inferiores Angelos per superiores, ut patet per Dionysium, in Cael. Hier. Et ideo, pari ratione, explicatio fidei oportet quod perveniat ad inferiores homines per maiores].

[144] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.2.6.arg.1—3, ad.1—3.

[145] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.2.6.arg.3, ['si minores non tenentur habere fidem explicitam, sed solum implicitam, oportet quod habeant fidem implicitam in fide maiorum. Sed hoc videtur esse periculosum, quia posset contingere quod illi maiores errarent. Ergo videtur quod minores etiam debeant habere fidem explicitam. Sic ergo omnes aequaliter tenentur ad explicite credendum].

> The simple have no faith implied in that of the learned, except in so far as the latter adhere to the Divine teaching. […] Hence it is not human knowledge, but the Divine truth that is the rule of faith: and if any of the learned stray from this rule, he does not harm the faith of the simple ones, who think that the learned believe aright.[146]

The simple are thus protected, Thomas maintains, by nature of their simple faith in Christ from the mistakes of erroneous clerks.[147] That is to say, those members of society whose station does not allow them the luxury of study and which thereby commits them to simple faith, are protected from irresponsible shepherds. Just as the body does not starve as a result of the agricultural mis-steps of a few plowmen, so the church need not crumble because of a few stuttering priests.

Thomas' account of the virtue of faith, of God as the *obiectum* of faith and of the means through which divine truth is mediated through the church seems to have led away from the questions raised earlier related to discerning and negotiating claims to the church's teaching authority in the opening lines of *Piers Plowman.* Compared to Thomas, it seems that Langland is preoccupied with the deliberating subject in such a way that the poem's puzzling over authority is doomed to infinite and regressive cycles of self-reference, perhaps even Pelagian presuppositions related to the role of free will and discernment. Thomas aims to break the reader out of these habits of mind through a

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[146] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.2.6.ad.3, ['minores non habent fidem implicitam in fide maiorum nisi quatenus maiores adhaerent doctrinae divinae, … . Unde humana cognitio non fit regula fidei, sed veritas divina. A qua si aliqui maiorum deficiant, non praeiudicat fidei simplicium, qui eos rectam fidem habere credunt].

[147] Thomas here carries forward a long tradition that goes back at least to Augustine's early debates against the Donatists. The mediation of God's grace is not precluded by the error or wickedness of the priest, otherwise, grace could not be mediated through human beings because all are imperfect. The power of God's grace comes from God, and is sufficient to pass through even the most imperfect vessels. See Adam Ployd *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 56-99.

deeper understanding of what it means for God to be the *obiectum* of faith, and not merely the 'object' in the modern English sense.[148]

It is now more apparent how three key aspects of Thomas' investigation of the relation between faith and the church's teaching authority are united. On the one hand, the act of faith, for Thomas, is a process through which the subject is engaged by the *obiectum*, God, and moved to offer assent to the One Who is believed. On the other hand, the specific articles related to who this God is who engages creatures and moves human beings towards assent are contained under symbols with greater explicitness across time which are themselves authoritatively mediated by the church as vivified by the Holy Spirit. As such, human beings are freed from the infinite spirals of regressive self-reference which result from locating the primary agency of the act of faith in the subject by re-orienting the concept of faith from the subject to the *obiectum:* God. The consequence of this all-important, paradigm shifting, theological move is that each and every article of the faith issued through the church's teaching authority must be accepted in order for a person to avoid temptation towards the sin which makes the private judgment of the individual the basis for determining right faith. The church can and must be trusted, and this is not equivalent to a sort of blind trust in a human authority because the church is itself established and vivified by God through the Holy Spirit. Trust in the church's teachings can take an implicit form as one grows in faith towards the more explicit belief in the articles of faith. Faith develops in the mind of the believer and also

[148] Rienhard Hutter 'Theological Faith Enlightening Sacred Theology', 'If you gain a distinct sense that by considering the full meaning of '*obiectum*' you are leaving behind the epistemic presuppositions entailed in the Cartesian rupture between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* as well as those entailed in the Kantian rupture between the transcendental ego and the 'thing in itself' (*das Ding an sich*) – you are right. You are, as a matter of fact, being directed to the exit of the maze of modern subjectivity with its interminable succession of aporetic epistemologies. According to the realist epistemology of the *philosophia perennis*, there obtains a primordial causal, that is specifying, engagement of the apperceptive faculties by the '*obiectum,*' which precedes and indeed enables the secondary epistemological reflection of this dynamic' (378).

develops through the explication which comes through the church's teaching authority as it adds to the articles of faith, thereby enjoying the fruit of the church's 'living faith' or ongoing engagement with the *obiectum* of its faith in the One Who engages it. This process of doctrinal development, both in the believer and in the community of faith across time, can be trusted because the agent who makes the unfolding of faith possible is none other than the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, working through the church. Finally, this development of doctrine is never to be confused with the mere accumulation of propositions, as if one day enough propositions or articles could be gathered so as to make possible either certitude or the vision of God. Rather, the act of assent through the faith of the believer and trust in the development of doctrine through the teaching authority of the church is, for Thomas, the proper activity of persons and the church *in time* as they respond to the engagement of God, and are swept up into participation in the divine life of the One Who is the *obiectum* and end of faith.

Thomas' teaching on the justifiability of the church's teaching authority is heir to the tradition of *fides quaerens intellectum* on a political scale. Belief, as well as knowledge of God and knowledge of self, begins not in the individual's capacity to judge the viability of the church's teaching authority, but rather in the individual's acceptance of the revealed truth being entrusted to and passed down through the historical church across time. Truth is a gift of grace. Truth, for Thomas, is also thoroughly mediated to finite creatures through complex processes of development within the teaching community of the church across time. Truth must be received, participated in and grow within a person and a community. This is because, for Thomas, the origin and *esse* of truth is God, not the rational judgment of the individual. As such, the journey of creatures

towards truth must begin with the reception of a gift on the basis of trust, faith, rather than the apparently solid ground provided by an individual who deems either an extrinsic authority, or the intrinsic authority of their own rational faculty, trustworthy on the basis of their individual, and hopelessly finite, resources.

There is an important distinction between what Thomas refers to as the heretical disposition to privilege private judgment, a mode of reasoning located in the agency of the individual rational powers of a depoliticized subject; and the way certain medieval authors, for the purposes of the present study, Chaucer and Langland, consider the relations between knowledge and authority, knowledge and power. Indeed, Chaucer and Langland press upon, and challenge, many of the tensions latent within Thomas' account because both are aware of and concerned with a cluster of problems involved in the relation between knowledge and power. Their investigations include a deep awareness of institutional power and cultural formation. Neither Chaucer nor Langland focus exclusively upon the citadel of the human self nor an abstract sense of rationality accessible to individuals separated from the world in which they find themselves, the same world that teaches them how to speak. The exploration of the particular tensions involved in the relation between knowledge and power by Langland and Chaucer result from suspicion of both the logical construction produced in the second half of Thomas' explication of faith and the political outworking of this theological vision in the fourteenth-century church.

The political upshot of Thomas' thinking concerns the normative disposition the church should take towards those who dissent from one or more articles of faith as

determined by the church. To the question, 'Whether Heretics Ought to be Tolerated,' Thomas responds,

> On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer, wherefore she [the Church] condemns not at once, but after the first and second admonition, as the Apostle directs: after that, if he [the heretic] is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death.[149]

Such a disposition towards those who dissent in one or more articles of the faith proclaimed by the church's teaching authority did not remain buried in the pages of this Dominican teaching manual, but took material form in, among other places, England in the state policies endorsed in 1401 and 1409 by way of Arundel's *Constitutions* which empowered bishops to arrest, imprison, examine and hand over to the secular authorities those who questioned the church's teaching concerning transubstantiation and/or usurped the office of preaching. These are the same policies which resulted in actual public burnings of figures like William Sawtry (1401).

§ How Chaucer and Langland problematize Thomas

For reasons that are as theological as they are political, Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* participates with Langland's *Piers Plowman* to critique Thomas' account of the way

[149] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.11.3.co, ['Ex parte autem Ecclesiae est misericordia, ad errantium conversionem. Et ideo non statim condemnat, sed post primam et secundam correctionem, ut apostolus docet. Postmodum vero, si adhuc pertinax inveniatur, Ecclesia, de eius conversione non sperans, aliorum saluti providet, eum ab Ecclesia separando per excommunicationis sententiam; et ulterius relinquit eum iudicio saeculari a mundo exterminandum per mortem].

legitimate claims to the church's teaching authority are to be received.[150] These two poems open up tensions within Thomas' scheme and challenge the degree to which the angelic doctor holds together the relation between authority and knowledge, between individual and communal identity, without collapsing the sign into the signified. Specifically, Langland and Chaucer expose the consequences of collapsing the signifier, the church, and the signified, the Body of Christ in the world, within Thomas' account.

Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* and Langland's *Piers Plowman* problematize Thomas' theological and ecclesial/political account of a benevolent hierarchical pedagogy. They do this by imagining figures who are not simply isolated instances of vicious ecclesial straw men who can in turn be satirized.[151] Instead, these two poems question (1) the theology of faith and authority at the heart of the tradition and politics of Thomas' account and (2) the rationality undergirding Thomas' specific theory of the development of doctrine by imagining ecclesial figures who form communities through institutionalizing practices of vice dressed in the linguistic, material and iconographic garb of Christianity. That is to say, Chaucer and Langland question the theology and politics bound up in Thomas' account of faith and authority by thinking through the contradictions that arise when it becomes imaginatively possible to form communities of vice which claim and invert the teachings and practices of the church.

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[150] Chaucer and Langland are neither alone, nor is there mode of writing the only bearer of such critique. Many medieval English drama's, like the *Shepherd Plays* are particularly interested in the co-optability of language and the formation of wicked communities. See Sarah Beckwith 'Drama' in Larry Scanlon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and her *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in The York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[151] For a nuanced study of the range of satire in this period see Jill Mann *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

The weight of Langland and Chaucer's critique lies in the serious problem which arises when rival claims to the Church's teaching authority occur not between *individuals* dissenting against the established community of the one Holy Catholic Church, but when competing *communities* are *created* whose divergent cultural practices and epistemological habits are formed in such a way as to normalize, institutionalize and even sacramentalize vicious practices. The question Langland and Chaucer raise is not simply how might a person be brought out of such cultural habituation in the vices, but rather how might one so awakened adjudicate between rival communities claiming the church's teaching authority and whose rationalities are grounded in practices and rituals legitimated by arguments, sacraments and iconography that are manipulated in ways that directly subvert the fundamental ordering principles of Christianity?[152] Or, as expressed in the terms of Will's Eucharistic anxiety at the opening of the poem's final passus,

> And as Y wente by the way, when Y was thus awaked,
> Heuy-chered Y yede and elyng in herte,
> For Y ne wiste where to ete ne at what place.[153]

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[152] This question is raised with exceptional force through the conclusion of *Piers Plowman*. The tradition Langland received through Augustine and Aquinas insists that sin effects the will, while leaving the intellect intact. For Augustine on the virtues see James Wetzel *Augustine and The Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Aquinas makes this point explicit in his ST Ia-IIae q.85, though I will suggest that other moments in the ST show Aquinas to leave the door open for a more pervasive effect of sin on the intellect, a tradition he may well receive from Boethius. Later Reformers will insist that both the will *and* the intellect are obfuscated by sin. Langland is no 'proto-protestant'. While 'Will', representative of both the faculty and also the poem's main character, is of primary interest in *Piers Plowman,* the poem offers no corollary figure to represent the intellect. What the poem does offer, however, is a thorough examination of both Will and Conscience, giving detailed attention to the various ways these characters/faculties develop and are influenced by different teachings as well as political powers and rival communities throughout the poem. Analysis of Langland's conception of the effects of sin beyond the will going on to the intellect are difficult to substantiate because the faculty itself is not explicitly taken up in the poem. However, Langland *is* supremely interested in the formation of Conscience, which will be explored in the rest of this study.

[153] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.1-3, [And as I went on my way after I awoke, / Sad-faced I walked and aching at heart, / For I didn't know where or at what place I could eat].

Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* succinctly raises the issue at hand and, comparatively, further illuminates Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Chaucer concisely, yet profoundly, problematizes Thomas' hierarchical theory of the church's teaching authority and faith by demonstrating how Thomas' commitment to an ordered, stable and sanctified teaching authority is not only vulnerable to manipulation and abuse, but also creates space for opportunistic ecclesiastics to form alternative communities claiming and competing for the authority of the Church.

Along the road to Canterbury, the Host invites the Pardoner to tell a moral tale. Chaucer's Pardoner prefaces his tale with a self-description of the single theme of all his preaching and of his ensuing speech, '*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*.'[154] Not only is the Pardoner's theme single, it is also static, unchanging, a memorized tale accompanied by a bit of Latin used to spice up his otherwise repetitive speech.[155] His static sermonizing descends from the ecclesiastical teaching hierarchy in the proper order Thomas describes above. The Pardoner delivers his teaching to the people on authority and pronouncement of letters patent along with 'Bulles of popes and of cardynales, / Of partiarkes and bishops.'[156] These official documents serve the double purpose not only of establishing and legitimating the Pardoner in the hierarchy of ecclesiastical teaching authority, but also of protecting him, in both body and in work, from neighboring ecclesiastics with whom his activity competes, '[These documents] shewe I first, my body to warente, /

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[154] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.332-5.
[155] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.332, 'For I kan al by rote that I telle'. Perhaps anticipating the anxiety resulting from accounts of Christian teaching that are not open to the kind of doctrinal development theorized by Thomas, and can thereby by used, like the Pardoner's rote sermonizing, for manipulation and extortion.
[156] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.342.

That no man be so boold, *ne preest ne clerk*, / Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.'[157] This wandering Pardoner preaches in parishes that are not his own and thus undermines the sacramental and teaching authority of local priests to instruct the people of their parishes and hear confession. As the conclusion of the *Pardoner's Tale* makes clear, this Pardoner not only competes for the spiritual, but also the economic, loyalty of the people as the money he wins is directed away from the local parish and parish priest and into his own pockets.[158]

Two further aspects of this Pardoner are particularly relevant for the present investigation. First, it is significant that the Pardoner promises the people, both at the outset and conclusion of his tale, control over elements that will grant them material as well as spiritual security. His relics promise healing to livestock, cure of marital jealousy and an abundant harvest.[159] The Pardoner's 'heigh power' of absolution, which is guaranteed by and descended from the authority of the pope, is available as a 'seuretee' against the unpredictable whims of fortune to any pilgrim who willingly exchanges their material wealth for the Pardoner's eternally effective absolution 'Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.'[160]

Second, both the Pardoner and the people are well aware, by way of the Pardoner's own public confession, of the duplicitous nature of his motivation,

For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,

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[157] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.338-41. These documents are also not unrelated to the documentation a wondering clerk would need in the wake of the Statute of 1388 discussed above.
[158] The relation between pardoner and priest is not necessarily competitive, indeed, Langland depicts the two figures working together to win money from the people of the parish, see *Piers Plowman* Prologue.79-80.
[159] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.347-76. These promises are not outlandish for a Pardoner to make regarding the material efficacy of relics in this period. See Aers, 'Alters of Power: Reflections on Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*', *Literature and History*, 3 (1994), pp. 90-105.
[160] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.903-40.

And nothyng for correccioun of synne.

I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed,

Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed!

…

But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:

I preche of no thyng but for coveityse.

…

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice

Which that I use, and that is avarice.

But though myself be gilty in that synne,

Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne

From avarice and soore to repente.

But that is nat my principal entente;

I preche nothyng but for coveitivse.

…

For though myself be a ful vicious man,

A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,

Which I am wont to preche for to wynne.[161]

It is important to appreciate the full weight of Chaucer's creation. The Pardoner cannot be reduced to the hopeless anachronism of some sort of proto-protestant satire anticipating Martin Luther's crusade against indulgences in far off lands some hundred

[161] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.403-6, 423-4, 427-33, 459-61.

and twenty years later.[162] Here, the Pardoner stands as something much more deeply unsettling to late medieval Orthodoxy. The Pardoner poetically embodies an orthodox possibility, a possibility protected by Thomas' account of the benevolent hierarchy of the church's teaching authority. The Pardoner is the possibility not only of a wicked ecclesiastic manipulating the people as well as church doctrine and practice for his own greed, but also the possibility of the formation of a community that is shaped by and dependent upon the material and spiritual economy undergirding and perpetuating the Pardoner's preaching. It is striking, though often unnoticed, that no one interrupts or seems offended by the Pardoner's intent. The people are silent. Instead of rebuke, the people show no sign of countering the economy of transactional absolution the Pardoner proposes. They listen to his story, apparently expecting him to make good on his promise to offer a *moral* tale. Thus, what is perhaps more unsettling than the Pardoner's vicious and public covetousness, is the people's complicit participation, even formation, in his spiritual and material economy. The Pardoner, operating with a teaching authority institutionally protected by bulls and letters of the ecclesial hierarchy, creates a community that accepts, and even depends upon, the Pardoner's transactional preaching and praxis of absolution. Like the friars in the Prologue of *Piers Plowman* 'Here moneye and merchandise marchen togyderes.'[163]

Members of this community who assent to and are formed around the Pardoner can defend the reasonability of offering this figure their assent on the grounds of church teaching. These pilgrims might accept the teaching and practice of the Pardoner on faith

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[162] Figures like John Tetzel, whose infamous 1517 sermon supported Archbishop of Mainz, Albert of Hohenzolleron's *Summary Instructions for Indulgence Preachers* and which no doubt triggered Martin Luther's 95 Thesis. See Hans J. Hillerbrand *The Protestant Reformation* Revised Edition (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), pp. 14-21.
[163] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.61.

precisely because his teachings are endorsed in the proper order of hierarchical ecclesial teaching. Indeed, for a pilgrim to dissent from the Pardoner would risk depending on one's private judgment or individual will which, according to Thomas, would in turn commit these pilgrims to the very root of heresy.[164] Yet, once assent is given to the Pardoner, the people become shaped, formed, even dependent upon the interconnected web of rationality and material and spiritual practices that constitute the Pardoner's teaching.[165] While the reader, and later the Host, may regard the Pardoner as a vicious farce, it is difficult to see what church endorsed resources the pilgrims have available that would allow them to dissent from the beliefs and ways of life the Pardoner teaches.[166]

Just how unsettling this Pardoner is to the established order of late medieval society and orthodoxy is evident in the tale's closing lines. As the Pardoner concludes his tale, he exhorts the people to participate in the monetary exchange that promises to make him rich and grant the people temporal gain and eternal security. He invites the Host to be the first to participate in his sacramental transaction. Famously, the Host lambasts the greasy-haired ecclesiastic, first with a joke and then with an, albeit colorful, threat of

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[164] Thomas does allow for fraternal correction, even admitting that the obligation for Christians to correct one another is not limited to prelates, but extends to all Christians (ST IIa-IIae q.33.3.co). However, Thomas distinguishes two modes of correction. In the first, correction is a warning out of and as an act of charity performed 'in a becoming manner, not with impudence and harshness' especially when a subject corrects a prelate (ST IIa-IIae q.33.3—4). This mode of fraternal correction, Thomas maintains, is open to and indeed the obligation of all Christians, and it is the mode of correction, or warning, a reader might expect the pilgrims to extend to the Pardoner. In the second manner, however, Thomas distinguishes the former mode of correction to the second, which is concerned with justice, and specifically punishment, and this manner of fraternal correction is not available for subjects to execute upon prelates (ST IIa-IIae q.33.3.co). Thus, the question, at least for readers of Thomas and Chaucer, remains open. Not only, how would the people effectively correct a pardoner whose character is so firmly established in avarice; but the larger question as well, how could a people formed and habituated by the teaching and sacramental practice of this figure even become aware of the Pardoner's error?

[165] There is a striking similarity here between Chaucer's Pardoner and Langland's Pardoner, see *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.66-81.

[166] Again, see Aquinas, ST IIaIIae q.33. For an interesting suggestion that Margary Kemp embodies the orthodox resources for fraternal correction in her debate with Archbishop Arundel see Edwin D. Craun ''3e, By Peter and by Poul!': Lewte and the Practice of Fraternal Correction' *Yearbook of Langland Studies,* 15 (2001), pp. 15-34.

violence against the Pardoner. In spite of the Pardoner's bulles and letters patent, the Host responds,

> Nay, nay…thanne have I Cristes curs!
>
> Lat be…it shal nat be, so theech!
>
> Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,
>
> And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
>
> Though it were with thy fundement depeint!
>
> But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,
>
> I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond. In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
>
> Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
>
> They shul be shryned in an hogges toord![167]

Here, the Host openly mocks both the Pardoner and the spiritual and material economy that this figure's sacramental practice establishes for the community. The people all laugh.[168] Yet, to consider the Host's speech as a long awaited corrective against the satiric figure of the Pardoner would be to under-read this moment. This moment is far more urgent, an urgency that the knight perceives and rushes to reconcile. The Host's joke and threat of violence risk subverting a sacramental practice that is not only necessary for the Pardoner's livelihood, but also for the very economy and cultural scaffolding of late medieval society, the church.[169] If the people, like the Host, begin to consider the validity of the sacrament of penance to depend upon the moral rectitude of the Pardoner, and thus possibly a laughing matter, the web of practices which organically

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[167] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.946-55.
[168] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.961.
[169] See Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) and *An Age of Transition: Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

hold society together will collapse under the intractable and inevitable fragmentation brought on by individual judgments of clerical fitness.[170] Furthermore, in terms of medieval orthodoxy, it remains unclear how the Host or the pilgrims could dissent from the Pardoner without handing themselves over to the forms of individual judgment that Thomas claims lie at the root of all heresy.

This moment also bears the weight of a political possibility beyond the ecclesial or theological. Abandonment of the ecclesial structures signified by the Pardoner may also lead to revolt akin to the Rising of 1381. Thus, people's laughter is not simply a response to the Host's moralizing jest. The people's laughter is a foretaste of the anarchy and cultural fragmentation that will ensue if the Pardoner and his economy are laughed out of the realm.

This moment portrays a crack in the dam that is otherwise securing the cultural and social order of late medieval society. Immediately, the knight, the icon of chivalry and the protector of the established order, rushes in to force the Host and the Pardoner to make amends, to silence the people's laughter, to maintain the social order and to keep the game going,

> But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,
> Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,
> 'Namoore of this, for it is right ynough!
> Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
> And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
> I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.

[170] See Wim Vroom, *Financing Cathedral Building in the Middle Ages: The Generosity of the Faithful* trans. Elizabeth Manton (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer,

And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye.'

Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.[171]

It is worth pointing out that while the knight's action in this moment interrupts ensuing anarchy, it also attempts to re-establish the epistemology of faith as it relates to the hierarchical pedagogy of the church. I say it *attempts* to do so because the knight neither endorses the Pardoner's teaching nor validates the Host's judgment of the Pardoner's practices. The knight merely halts their argument in a way that leaves the question open. The disagreement is not resolved, and the reader is left wondering how a late medieval Christian might judge the teachings and practices of the Pardoner without (1) heretically depending on his or her own private judgment or (2) validating the covetousness that the Pardoner embodies and which in turn malforms the people through his manipulation of the language and sacraments of Christian discipleship. More simply put, what resources do medieval Christians have for resisting vicious epistemic and cultural formations grounded in communities without dissolving into the unending spirals of self-reference and private judgment constitutive of heresy?

Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* thus problematizes Thomas' account of the relationship between *fides quae* and *fides qua*. He does so by creating a farcical and duplicitous figure whose corruption of the Church's sacramental practice of penance not only has a vicious effect on the community, but whose very possibility as well as the community formed around him cannot be guarded against as a consequence of Thomas' teaching concerning the *ordo* of the church's benevolent hierarchical teaching authority. Thomas teaches,

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[171] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI.960-968.

> The simple have no faith implied in that of the learned, except in so far as the latter adhere to the Divine teaching. […] Hence it is not human knowledge, but the Divine truth that is the rule of faith: and if any of the learned stray from this rule, he does not harm the faith of the simple ones, who think that the learned believe aright.[172]

How then does one account for both the Pardoner and the community formed around him? The Pardoner stands not merely as a confused, or even greedy, clerk. Rather he stands as a possibility, a possibility protected by medieval orthodoxy, of a wayward ecclesiastic who can in turn manipulate the language, practices and sacraments of the church to form communities that cannot live without him. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the *Pardoner's Tale* how would it be possible to judge between rival rationalities? On the one hand, a rationality asserting (1) that the community formed around the material and spiritual economy of the Pardoner, and safeguarded by the knight, is just as vicious as the Pardoner himself proclaims to be. And on the other, a rationality (2) so formed by the assumptions and institutions of medieval Christianity as to make a people unable to see themselves as swept up into anything other than the one organically formed through the tapestry of late medieval ecclesial practices? That is to say, how would it be possible for people and communities so formed by institutionalized patterns of vice to identify their own cultural habits as vicious? This is one of the focal questions that Chaucer and Langland raise to Thomas' account.

Langland shares Chaucer's anxiety over the possibility of a community that claims both the church's teaching authority and the normative forms of Christianity while

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[172] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.2.6.ad.3, ['minores non habent fidem implicitam in fide maiorum nisi quatenus maiores adhaerent doctrinae divinae, …. Unde humana cognitio non fit regula fidei, sed veritas divina. A qua si aliqui maiorum deficiant, non praeiudicat fidei simplicium, qui eos rectam fidem habere credunt].

using these same claims to institutionalize and normalize sin, quite literally to cement sin into the very cultural fabric of a society through errant teachers and the commodification of the sacraments. It is an anxiety *Piers Plowman* expresses succinctly through the voice of *Liberum Arbitrium*,

> As holiness and honestee out of holy churche
> Spryngeth and spredeth and enspireth the peple
> Thorw parfit preesthoed and prelates of holy churche,
> Riht so oute of holy churche al euel spredeth
> There inparfit preestboed is, prechares and techares.[173]

It is not simply that Langland and Chaucer share a similar anxiety over the potential corruptibility or cooption of a community claiming the name church. Rather, *Piers Plowman* goes a step farther to both model and also instruct its audience in certain habits of language and discourse for discerning and negotiating different voices competing for the power of the church. *Piers Plowman*'s model, this mode of instruction, is best understood as a thick description of communion. That is to say, it is a way of appreciating the discernment of truth as an ongoing process that seeks not simply to sort out competing voices but rather depends upon bringing about ideological and theological collisions in order to continue on the journey in a way that avoids reification and idolatry, Eucharistic, ecclesial, or otherwise. Put another way, Langland's work models a form of poetic disputation that methodologically necessitates a communion through collisions of radically diverse voices. Unlike the knight of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, Langland seeks no premature or false reconciliation. Rather, the poetry models for the audience a poetic

[173] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.242-7, [As holiness and honesty out of Holy Church / Spring and spread and inspire the people / Through perfect priesthood and prelates of Holy Church, / Just so out of Holy Church all evil spreads / Where imperfect priesthood is, preachers and teachers].

communion witnessed only by a complex series of substantive disagreements. The disjunctions, the ruptures, the interruptions and fragmentations of *Piers Plowman* are never resolved. Yet, through the practice, the holding together, of this poetic communion, the audience, like Will and Conscience, are changed. At the end, the audience, like Will and Conscience, is invited to return to the beginning and take up the journey once more. To continue along the mystical journey of self-knowing alluded to by Julian of Norwich in the fifty-sixth chapter of her *Showings,* a journey in which the beginning elides into the end as the destination becomes the *via*.[174]

The capacity of Langland's poetry to train its audience in complex and subtle habits of language is evident in Conscience's description of the church in the Prologue, immediately following the bleak description of the church and world considered earlier in this chapter. It is neither a coincidence, nor is it inconsequential that Conscience offers critical judgment against the corruption that Will can only behold.[175] The Prologue begins with Will's vision of the folk, a people wandering through the maze of the world. While Will certainly beholds many who commit themselves to work, prayers and penances in hope of 'a good ende and heuenriche blisse', he also sees ecclesial figures who fail in their charge to cultivate charity. Friars of all four orders bind their money-making with their trade in souls such that they preach for their own profit and contort the gospel

[174] Julian of Norwich *Showings* (Long text) in *Julian of Norwich: Showings* trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 288-90, 'For our soul sits in God in true rest, and our soul stands in God in sure strength, and our soul is naturally rooted in God in endless love. And therefore if we want to have knowledge of our soul, and communion and discourse with it, we must seek in our Lord God in whom it is enclosed.'

[175] That Conscience, and not Will, is capable of judging errant behavior in the Prologue is evident in so far as Will proves incapable of interpreting his own dream. Despite Will's opening assertion immediately after awaking from the dream of the Prologue that, 'What the montaigne bymeneth and the merke dale / And the feld ful of folk Y shal you fair shewe', it is Holy Church, not Will, who explains the dream's meaning (I.1-2, 3–75).

towards covetous ends with glosses that contradict authorities.[176] A Pardoner much like Chaucer's preaches, 'as he a prest were', and blinds the people by striking them with 'a bulle with bischopis selys' only then to use the very same papal parchment to rake in the people's goods.[177] Unlike Chaucer's Pardoner, however, Langland's Pardoner is not in competition, but rather conspires with the parish priest and together they divide the people's assets.[178] Thus, all levels of local ecclesial leadership, parsons and parish priests, and not just pardoners, are equally bound up in this corruption of the church's leadership as they collectively conspire to win the people's goods.[179] Meanwhile, higher up the ecclesial hierarchy, the bishops who are entrusted with the disciplinary authority necessary to correct errant clerks and thereby maintain shepherds fit to cultivate charity throughout the realm choose to live in London and serve the financial and administrative needs of the king's court rather than the spiritual and communal needs of England's parishes.[180] As will become clear, it is significant that in this particular moment the figure/faculty of Conscience, not Will, nor the later figures/faculties of Holy Churche, Thought, Wit, Reason, or Imaginatif, much less Kynde, Abraham, *Spes* or the Samaritan, accuses these leaders of their failure in cultivating charity in their parishes and for their covetous desires to move to London.[181]

It is over this field that Conscience accuses an ecclesial leadership at both the local and hierarchical levels. Conscience claims these shepherds have not merely become

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[176] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.56-61.
[177] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.66-73.
[178] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.79.
[179] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.81-4, These local priests, parsons and pardoners complain to the Bishops about the poverty resulting from the Black Death, and abandon their appointed flocks to move to London and work for the king's court.
[180] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.85-94.
[181] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.95.

greedy, their covetousness enculturates 'Ydolatrie.'[182] For Conscience, the very relics and images that these ecclesiastics use to confiscate offerings are false.[183] Thus, 'prelates', Conscience accuses, are not merely procuring an unjust portion of the common's earnings, but rather church officials are quite literally placing idols before parishes as a means to generate additional income to feed their own covetousness. Errant authorities are thereby creating an idolatrous culture supported by the language and rituals of Holy Church,

> Ac for it profiteth yow into pursward ye prelates soffren
> That lewed men in mysbileue lyuen and dyen.
> I leue, by oure lord, for loue of youre coueytise
> That al the world be the wors, as holy writ telleth.[184]

Conscience's accusation is both temporal and eternal. The world and church ordered by these leaders is one dominated by greed, idolatry and manipulation of the commons. Yet, it is not merely the temporal manipulation of the commons which Conscience condemns, but also the eternal consequences brought on by prelates who allow, even thrust, unlearned folk into habits of idolatry and exchange which shape not only their living, but also their dying in misbelief. The unlearned formed by these prelates may well be damned, habituated in mind and practice into a culture of idolatry and exchange through which they abuse and are abused in this life and damned in the next. While Conscience's accusation against such corrupt and corrupting ecclesial figures is echoed in contemporary works such as *Dives and the Pauper* as well as a range of Wycliffite texts,

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[182] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.96.
[183] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.97-102.
[184] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.101-4, [But because it profits your purses you prelates allow / Unlearned men to live and die in misbelief. / Good lord! because you love to be covetous / I believe the world grows worse, as holy writ tells].

it is the particular mode of Langland's poetry that makes his form of writing and representation uniquely capable for theological investigation.

Conscience's subtle representation of the systemic and widespread co-option of the church demonstrates the unique capacity of Langland's poetry to train its audience in certain linguistic habits that form in the audience a disposition for poetic communion. In these first hundred lines of the Prologue, Langland has portrayed a bleak picture of the church and the world. The audience beholds a maze of misdirection made worse by corruptions contorting the church, the very institution that should produce trustworthy guides for the folk and help them see the way between the castle of truth and the deep dale of death.[185] To this field of misguided pilgrims and errant ecclesiastics, 'Consience cam and accused hem – and the / commune herd hit.'[186] Conscience's accusation is for 'Ydolarie.' An idolatry that grows and becomes more insidious through the very economies of covetousness and greed in which 'moneye and merchandise' have been show to 'marchen togyderes.' He calls foul upon what he sees portrayed in the Prologue's survey of the field of the church and world and then cites the biblical story of Ophni and Phinees as a sort of warning or prophecy for what comes when religious leaders disregard their calling and take advantage of God's people.[187] Then, Conscience turns his gaze upon the contemporary ecclesiastics. The specific form of Conscience's critique offers an illustrative example of the powerful theological capacity of Langland's poetry,

'Ac of the cardinales at court that caught han such a name
And power presumen in hemself a pope to make,
To haue the power that Peter hadde inpugne hem Y nelle,

[185] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.15-7.
[186] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.95.
[187] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.106-17. See also 1 Samuel 2:12-17.

For in loue and lettrure lith the grete eleccoun;

Contreplede hit noght,' quod Consience, 'for holi kirke sake.'[188]

Conscience's identification of this ecclesial order, both in particular word choice, line order and in the structure of the poetry itself, allows for a mode of representation that runs in at least two directions at once. In terms of word choice, specifically 'caught' and 'presumen', Conscience's speech creates a subversive space regarding the validity of this ecclesial hierarchy's cardinals to make a pope. Are these cardinals, in the double sense of both church officials and also the cardinal virtues, void of the character befitting their title, thus leading them to catch, or grab an office inconsistent with their character?[189] If so, certainly the presumption that such unfit officials could make a pope is extremely dangerous and ought to be impugned. If the cardinals falsely claim their titles and rights for electing a pope, then the pope, and not just the cardinals, may be false.[190] Conscience's accusation is ordered so as to pull the audience towards just this type of negative judgment. Such a negative judgment is only countered, and qualitatively so, at the very end of the third line.

In three consecutive lines, Conscience piles up language and hints that push the audience towards a negative judgment of this ecclesial hierarchy's efficacy. That this negative judgment is countered, but only at the end of a long sequence of subversion,

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[188] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue.134-8, ['But the cardinals at court that the name also claim / And its power presume in their choosing a pope, / That power from Peter I would never impugn, / For in love and learning lies the great election; / Don't contradict it for Holy Church's sake,' said Conscience].

[189] Langland will raise this question again later in the poem regarding the second sense of cardinal by portraying a church whose language of the virtues has been inverted. Here Langland is, perhaps, questioning the validity of certain ecclesial figures. But his anxiety extends beyond persons wrongfully catching titles and extends further to a culture capable of producing languages through which corrupted and co-opted grammars allow words themselves to betray their meaning. For a study of this in *Piers Plowman* see David Aers 'Langland on the Church and the End of the Cardinal Virtues', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42 (2012), pp. 59-81.

[190] See Norman Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades 1305-1378* (Oxford University Press 1986) and Walter Ullmann *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (Methuen & Co Ltd: London 1972), pp. 279-305.

qualifies the weight an audience might attach to Conscience's 'nelle.' Furthermore, this 'nelle' is not established on grounds that would explain or excuse the series of questions opened up by the language and order of Conscience's preliminary utterance. For, what immediately follows this 'nelle' is Conscience's affirmation that the election of the pope is determined by love and learning rather than by rights or titles. Thus, this affirmation does not acquit the cardinals if they have merely 'caught' their authority through covetous desire, rather than earned it through love and learning. Conscience, however, refuses to question the validity of the processes through which cardinals appoint a pope according to love and learning. The validity of such a process is necessary 'for holi kirke sake' because trust in such processes, as Aquinas explained above, is necessary in order to affirm the possibility of the church as a community that carries on the living tradition and political witness of Christ's presence on earth across time.[191] However, the language, order and structure of Conscience's speech are subtly ambiguous. It is open to forms of reading that invite subversion, question and impugn against those claiming the title of cardinal and pope. The criteria for such a critical view of contemporary clerics, so the poetry hints, is if their actions and character do not reflect the love and learning necessary for their facilitation of the processes constitutive of papal election, church governance and the embodied witness of the kingdom of God.

The poetry through which Conscience's accusation is given voice allows for a unique representation of how one might identify the complex realities bound up in claims

[191] This is also affirmed by Hugh of Saint Victor. Although the concept of the church as a visible community is countered by Jon Huss and John Wycliffe who radicalize Augustine's ecclesiology to argue for the invisibility of the 'true' church. See Ian Christopher Levy *A Companion to John Wyclif* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) and Matthew Spinka, *John Hus' Concept of the Church* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1966).

to ecclesial authority. Conscience is not Wycliffe.[192] He affirms the validity of the processes necessary for the election and organization of figures in the church so that the community can persevere as a political reality and temporal witness in the world, 'To haue the power that Peter hadde inpugne hem Y nelle.' Yet, what Conscience does not elaborate upon here, but what the poem will attend to through its unfolding, is that the power given to Peter is the power to forgive, to bind and loose, to care for the poor, the sick, the widow, children, the imprisoned and the hungry; a power not to be confused with dominion.[193] For Conscience, as for Thomas and the tradition inherited by late medieval Christendom, Christianity is a living tradition carried on by the community engaged by and responsive to the *obiectum* of faith: God. However, Conscience's particular speech act in this scene embodies a substantive affirmation of this tradition in a unique way. His speech draws these very tensions into a sort of communion that maintains, even deepens, the disjunction. Poetically, Conscience offers carefully chosen words formally structured in a way that pairs his substantive affirmation with a formal skepticism against whole-sale acceptance of potentially vicious authorities wrongfully claiming titles and duties unbefitting their character. That is to say, Conscience's speech is a sort of poetic communion that not only holds but also heightens key ideological and theological tensions.

This relation between form and substance, as well as that between obedience and skepticism, shift throughout *Piers Plowman* and will be discussed throughout the present study. Remaining in this moment, however, Conscience's accusation here demonstrates

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[192] David Aers, *Faith, Ethics, and Church: writing in England, 1360-1409* (New York, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

[193] See, 'whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all' (Mark 10:44), 'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it' (Mark 8:35), Matthew 25:31-46 and Matthew 18.

just one example of the unique theological capacity of Langland's poetry. It is a capacity to instruct an audience not just in how to say two things at once, but rather in how to affirm certain ideas substantively while also raising questions through the details of its form. As such, the poetry is capable of holding together and pressing the severity of certain implications between disparate positions. Langland's poetic communion can both affirm and raise questions about complex topics in a way that inhabits certain tensions without resolving them. Furthermore, the poem provides a mode of discourse capable of substantively affirming orthodox positions while also naming the gap between the ideals of orthodoxy and the temporal/material reality of the church in the world, the gap between the sign and the signified. In reading this passage, specific attention has been given to the way particular words, line order and the structure of Conscience's poetry are shaped in order to resist collapsing the sign and the signified as relates to orthodox ecclesiology. If the church really is the *mystical* body of Christ in the world, and not reducible to either an invisible community or an unimpeachable army of God, then such linguistic subtlety is not only necessary, but imperative in order for Christians to avoid the extremes of individualistic pietism on the one hand, and corporate communitarian or institutional idolatry on the other. If there is a theology of selfhood in *Piers Plowman* it is best understood as an understanding of self that is utterly fragmented and opaque, but in a constructive sense. The fragmentation and mystery of a self is an absolutely critical characteristic for pilgrims who aim to avoid reified or idolatrous self-conceptions.

Conscience's accusation exhibits only a few of the modes of complex representation Langland's poetry employs. Line breaks, allegory, alliteration, shifting grammars, faculties and figures as well as narratively structured modes of dialectic work

together to produce other fecund and complex modes of representation throughout the work. These and other techniques are explored as the present analysis moves on to later moments in poem, and in so doing aims to further demonstrate the ways Langland's unique forms of poetry attempt to offer an art capable of stretching language fit to signify, or point towards, the signified in a way that is simultaneously confident yet vulnerable.[194]

Having demonstrated an instance of the poetry's effectiveness in a few passages, this analysis now moves to consider the way in which the poetry functions on a broader scale. Specifically, chapter two explores the way *Piers Plowman* represents the processes through which the church, and Conscience in particular, are corrupted. One of the goals of the ensuing chapter is to demonstrate not only the robust theological potency of Langland's art, but also the particular way in which the poem's art proves capable of offering investigations around the relation between Conscience and Will, that spiral more deeply into the relations between the self, individual and communal identity and language.

[194] A mode of speech particularly capable of both heights and limitations that Aquinas ascribes to analogical speech (in contradistinction to univocal and equivocal speech), Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Editio Manualis Leonina (Rome: Marietti, 1946), I.32-4.

Chapter 2.1

Conscience's 'turning'

The poetry of both Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* and Langland's *Piers Plowman* raise piercing questions to Thomas Aquinas' account of ecclesial authority and the way Christian doctrine both develops and is passed on through the church across time. Chaucer's depiction of the Pardoner and the community that forms around him raises the stakes of the Canterbury pilgrims' game. *Piers Plowman* goes further to imagine a church whose leaders at every level, rather than Chaucer's single errant clerk, as well as the church's rituals and sacramental practices are so thoroughly inverted as to become an institution that forms people and communities in deadly vices under the guise of a commodified holiness. Langland's depiction of Conscience's critique of the church in the Prologue demonstrates the unique capacity of Langland's poetry to cultivate certain linguistic habits in his audience, forming in them a disposition for what this thesis calls 'poetic communion.' This refers to habits of speech that are instrumental for pilgrims seeking to discern truth between rival communities competing for souls in the maze of the world.

Conscience's critique of the church in the Prologue is not limited to an ideological or noetic tradition constituted and carried on through certain doctrines or abstract ideas.

Rather, his critique includes the community of persons whose corporate practices and forms of life are corrupted by their imperfect capacity to rightly participate in the very practices and sacraments necessary to know God in and through Christ's body the church. That is not to suggest that Langland's depiction of the church, however critical the depiction may be, is reducible to neat and tidy dichotomies of good and evil, true or false, ideal verses errant. Rather, Conscience displays subtle habits of seeing and naming good and evil even when they are veiled in the midst of the Prologue's maze. Yet, as the poem unfolds, the audience will witness ways in which Conscience is portrayed as a figure or faculty quite capable of error and this presents a profound problem. The problem concerns pilgrims caught between rival communities claiming the title 'church.' Specifically, if Conscience is both a malleable human faculty and simultaneously understood to be instrumental in the discernment between good and evil, urgent questions concerning Conscience's capacity as a guide emerge. The ways in which Langland's poetry describes Conscience's transformation from one capable of subtle discernment in the midst of the Prologue's maze, to one led into confusion by Kynde Wit in the final passus require analysis.

The nuanced way *Piers Plowman* explores Conscience's malleability illuminates the processes of transformation the poem imagines for other figures as well. In particular, the transformation of those figures who go on to constitute the corrupt and corrupting community Conscience discerns to be parading under the name 'church' in the Prologue as well as the distinct community called 'Vnity' in the final passus. The processes, limits, consequences and possibilities of Conscience's transformations underscore what Langland imagines to be possible in the embodied church 'Vnity' in the last passus.

Furthermore, it is only through close attention to Conscience's transformation(s) across this long poem that Langland's audience is equipped to interpret Conscience's decision to depart from 'Vnity' at the poem's end.

The interactions and habituations leading to the corruption of the church in *Piers Plowman* are inseparable from the processes through which the poem represents the formation of Conscience. As such, detailed attention to Conscience's formation can bring into focus one way Langland attempts to train his audience not only in subtle habits of speech, but also in the habits necessary for identifying one's own participation in the processes that form and malform Conscience, a self and specifically a self formed in and through participation in the church.

Sarah Wood's recent study argues that interpretations of Conscience in *Piers Plowman* based upon scholastic faculty psychology tend to flatten the texture of the poem by assuming pre-existing medieval scholastic discourse determines Langland's understanding of Conscience.[195] For Wood, Langland's depiction of Conscience does not merely illustrate 'an already-extant proposition' that he revises to bring more thoroughly into line with this prior scholastic formulation.[196] Rather, Wood argues that Langland's depiction of Conscience 're-presents' Conscience in a variety of different ways across the poem within a series of different discourses, including legal, homiletic, and vernacular religious manuals.[197] As such, Wood argues, 'The poem's argument develops, not the character [of Conscience].'[198]

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[195] Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.
[196] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition,* p. 5.
[197] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition,* p. 13, see also p. 4, 161-6.
[198] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, p. 12.

Specifically, Woods suggests that Langland's depiction of Conscience in the final passus is 'a specific instantiation of 'conscience.'' She continues, 'He [Conscience] here becomes an example of a lordly conscience easily misled by friars.'[199] For Woods, Conscience does not 'develop', but rather 'Conscience remains fundamentally unchanged from his original appearance in the debate with Meed in the first vision.'[200] Woods interprets Langland's representation of Conscience as a figure who 'remains true to a knightly type throughout.' She argues, 'All that changes is the mode within which Langland composes the figure.'[201] In contrast, the present chapter will argue that Langland does not depict a particular *kind* of 'conscience', knightly or otherwise, but rather draws upon a wide range of theological and contemporary vernacular reflection concerning 'Clergie' and 'Kynde Wit' as key influences in the formation of Conscience. As the poem unfolds, and both Clergie and Kynde Wit influence Conscience in a variety of ways, Conscience emerges as a figure who is not static at all (*contra* Woods), but rather vulnerable and fragile.[202] Specific attention will be given to Conscience's formation and the extent to which the poem depicts the challenges that emerge when Conscience is understood to be a malleable human faculty simultaneously understood to be instrumental in the discernment between good and evil. Conscience is a figure in the poem whom Langland consistently deconstructs and rebuilds along a journey that never

[199] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, p. 88.
[200] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, p. 43.
[201] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition,* p. 43.
[202] See David Aers, *Beyond Reformation: An Essay on William Langland's* Piers Plowman *and the End of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), p. 133, 'If Conscience is 'the site of truth,' Langland is showing how vulnerable and fragile God's precious gift may be when immersed in a cultural revolution involving de-Christianizing powers.' See also his *Beyond Reformation*, p. 204, n. 290.

ends.[203] While Conscience's journey, like that of the poem, never ends, Conscience's various routes are not meaningless. The ways in which Langland's poem attempts to train its audience to become able to discern the directions and consequences of Conscience's formation will be demonstrated in what follows.

Wood's warning against flattening Langland's representation of Conscience as a mere illustration of pre-existing scholastic discourse is certainly correct.[204] While Wood rightly notes that Langland's personifications do not develop 'like characters in a novel', it remains the case that Langland does not depict Conscience as a faculty that is merely 're-presented' in different modes of discourse, but rather as a faculty that is formed and shaped, 'turned', through its interactions across the poem.[205] Furthermore, Langland's nuanced depiction of Conscience's 'turning', and Clergie and Kynde Wit's role therein, offers an example of Langland's poetry testing the limits of theological orthodoxy and the potential his poetry has for participating in the development of church teaching concerning the role of 'clerical' authority in catechesis and the development of doctrine more broadly.[206]

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[203] See A.C. Spearing '*Piers Plowman*: Allegory and Verbal Practice,' in his *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1987). Spearing describes Langland's poetry as perpetually in process 'displacing and deconstructing itself as it is being produced', p. 244.

[204] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition,* p. 161-166. So to, her keen and well-supported argument for the value of comparing the A, B and C versions as wholes in order to better discern the development of Langland's argument and the reasons for his revisions between versions.

[205] Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, p. 1-14: This is a move which readers who share Warner's anxiety over summary accounts of a work that he perceives to be as fractile as *Piers Plowman* may well take issue. However, I cannot dismiss the consistent presence of particular narrative representations in the poem as meaningless. The links between figures and topics within the poem examined here reveal a great deal about the way Langland aims to represent the figure of Conscience as related to questions pertaining to ecclesial authority. See Lawrence Warner *The Myth of Piers Plowman: Constructing a Medieval Literary Archive* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2014).

[206] As Anne Middleton, Wendy Scase and Fiona Somerset have shown, Langland's reflection upon various forms of 'clergy' operates at multiple levels (for example clergy vs. lay, learning vs. ignorance) and within the context of developing forms of anti-clerical discourse in late fourteenth century England. Such distinctions will be considered in detail below. See Anne Middleton, 'Acts of Vagrancy: The C Version 'Autobiography' and the Statute of 1388' in Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds. *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Wendy Scase Piers Plowman

Langland himself hints towards this understanding of Conscience's malleability in Passus III when Lady Mede's defenders set out 'Among knythes and clerkes Consience to turne.'[207] If Conscience, a figure and faculty initially presented as capable of seeing and naming the corruptions of the church in the Prologue is capable of being 'turned' (perverted) to serve the interests of Lady Mede, this questions Conscience's capacity to be trustworthy as a guide in the search for truth. This becomes increasingly urgent when pilgrims, like Will, are caught between rival communities claiming the identity of the very community in Langland's medieval world which should lead pilgrims to truth, the church. Conscience himself names this anxiety precisely, 'For clerkes and coueitise Mede hath knet togederes / That al the witt of the world is woxe into gyle.'[208] If Lady Mede is successful, so Conscience warns, the very wisdom which clerks should offer to instruct pilgrims through the maze of the world on the journey towards truth will not merely be reduced to nonsense, but rather transformed into its opposite, 'gyle.' Clerks, Conscience warns, will then become the sowers, the evangelists, of a deceit that will lead communities to unravel and its people to death. As *Piers Plowman* unfolds, Langland critically analyzes how a pilgrim or a community might become capable of discerning the malformation of their own Conscience (both corporate and individual) if Conscience is itself perverted. Langland's subtle depiction of Conscience's malformation at court, and figures like Kynde Wit who instruct him therein, need to be analyzed, as do the figures Langland uses to critique Kynde Wit and his influence upon Conscience.

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and the New Anti-clericalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Fiona Somerset *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[207] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, III.49.

[208] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, III.210, [For Meed has so knit up clerks with covetousness / That all the world's wisdom is turned into guile].

§ Conscience at Court

One of the most lasting influences Conscience perpetually recalls over the course of the poem is that of the king's court.[209] The extent of this influence is significant because Conscience eventually becomes the leader of 'Vnity', Langland's imagined form of the embodied instantiation of Holy Church in late medieval England, in the poem's penultimate passus.[210] In this way, Conscience provides a complex representation of a figure shaped and influenced by the politics of both church and realm and leaves the audience to judge between formations, assumptions and practices constitutive of these distinct yet overlapping communities that orient Conscience's leadership and contribute to the collapse of Unity later in the poem. Close attention to these influences are vital for any interpretation of Conscience's decisions at the poem's end.

Like the church of the Prologue, *Piers Plowman* represents the king's court as corrupt, a corruption brought on particularly through the machinations made possible through the presence of Lady Mede. Lady Mede is a personification of human reward offered prior to the completion of labour, and is given a range of scholarly interpretations inflected by gender as well as economic studies on feudalism and the development of capital in the late fourteenth century.[211] In the poem itself, figures like Theology argue that Lady Mede is morally neutral, while Conscience argues that certain corruptions are introduced into society through the presence of Lady Mede.[212] Whether this corruption comes through Lady Mede's own active manipulative agency or as a result of her being

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[209] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, II.200-III.
[210] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.256-356.
[211] T.A Yunck, *The Lineage of Lady Meed: The Development of Medieval Veniality Satire* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1963).
[212] For Theology's voice see Langland, *Piers Plowman* II.123. For Conscience's perspective see III.155-498.

abused by members of the court and wider society is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, the present analysis focuses on Conscience's capacity to recognize certain corruptions of both church and realm that result from the presence of Lady Mede and how that capacity for recognition slips away as the poem unfolds.

Piers Plowman offers an account of the joint role of two central teachers who influence Conscience at court. Specifically, Langland portrays Kynde Wit and Clergie as central to Conscience's early formation. In its representation of these two figures, Langland's poetry draws the audience's attention to the interactions between Conscience, Kynde Wit, and Clergie and the ways those interactions unfold across the poem to influence Conscience. The poem's ongoing iterative representation of these figures and their mutual influence illuminates challenges and possibilities constitutive of a pilgrim's journey to learn how and who to trust along the way to truth.

The apparently clear-eyed Conscience whom the audience first meets at court critiques Lady Mede's influence upon both court and society for seducing the realm to be dominated by a lust for reward,

> Trewe burgeys and bonde [s]he bryngeth to nauhte ofte
> And al the comune in care and in coueytise.
> Religioun [s]he al to-reueth and oute of reule to lybbe.
> Ther ne is cite vnder sonne ne noon so ryche reume
> Ther [s]he is allowed and ylet by that laste shal eny while
> Withouten werre other wo other wickede lawe
> And custumes of coueytise the comune to destroy.[213]

[213] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* III.201–7, [She often brings down true burgesses and bondsmen / And the commons into care and covetousness. / She deprives religion and gives it disorder. / There's no city under

Conscience's debate with and critique of Lady Mede before the king displays Conscience's deep anxiety over the bi-directional corruption of church and realm she introduces. As Conscience sees it, not only are burgesses, bondsmen and the commons consequently conformed in greed, but religious orders are also coaxed to live contrary to their rule through their formation in this sin. Furthermore, these religious figures' malformation leads them, like Chaucer's Pardoner, to sacralize covetousness for the people. Conscience's capacity to recognize, to identify, the dangers of these influences upon church and realm are unique to this moment in the poem. For as *Piers Plowman* draws to a close, Conscience will knowingly permit a member of a religious order corrupted by and who perpetuates covetousness to operate within the church, an operation that leads to both the collapse of 'Vnity' and Conscience's departure.[214] Conscience's decision is not the result of a momentary lapse of judgment, but rather traceable to processes of formation that are intentionally linked across the poem's narrative. These long processes through which *Piers Plowman* portrays the formation of Conscience elucidate how the goal of Lady Mede's first defenders is finally accomplished at the poem's end, 'Among knythes and clerkes Consience to turne.'[215] It is this turning, it can be argued, that results in Friar Flattery's permitted entrance.

While this early figure of Conscience proves capable of seeing and naming perceived corruptions Lady Mede introduces to society, Conscience's life at court instills in him an expectation of a church whose political ordering maintains the class distinctions of the status quo, while holding out hope that such an ordering of church and

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the sun nor realm so rich / Where she's praised and permitted that can last at all / Without wars or disaster or wicked laws / And covetous customs that destroy the commons]. This vision of a society that locks sin in is repeated later by Dame Study XI.1-90.

[214] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.323.

[215] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, III.49.

realm is tenable, indeed faithful, in light of the possibility of a good king who will one day rule an ordered society according to perfect justice. This is most evident in Conscience's long speech in Passus III, 'I, Consience, knowe this, for Kynde Wit me tauhte / That resoun shal regne and reumes gouerne / … And o cristene kyng kepe vs echone.'[216] Conscience's hope-filled theocratic vision, as indebted as it may or may not be to contemporary genres of millennial prophecy, expands to include a cosmic vision of peace drawing on the vision of Isaiah.[217] Yet, the figure who instructs Conscience in the formation of this theocratic vision is specific: 'Kynde Wit me tauhte.' The poem's representation of Kynde Wit will be analyzed in more detail below. In the interim, Derek Pearsall's description of Kynde Wit as 'natural practical reason, the inborn gift of intelligence, unillumined by divine revelation' is a helpful shorthand for what Kynde Wit might represent as well as gesture towards his limitations.[218] This able, yet limited, figure's vision and interpretation of Isaiah are by no means uncontroversial in either Langland's world or in the broader tradition Langland receives.[219]

While a fourth-century figure like Eusebius of Caesarea lauded Constantine as a divinely ordained Christian king sent to establish peace and restore the church following various Roman persecutions, other contemporary patristic theologians like Gregory the Great and Augustine harbored far more reticence about any ordained partnership between church and empire.[220] Neither Gregory nor Augustine harbour aspirations for a good

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[216] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* III.436-57 ['I, Conscience, know this, for Common Sense taught me / That reason shall reign and govern all realms / … And one Christian king look after us all'].
[217] K. Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[218] Derek Pearsall, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), p. 51 n. 141.
[219] See David Aers *Beyond Reformation.*
[220] Eusebius Caesariensis sec. transl. quam fecit Rufinus *Historia ecclesiastica* (CPL 0198 K (A)) lib. : 10, cap. : 1-2, p. 859ff (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

Christian king to rule the world in perfect justice. Such a hope was inconceivable for these two churchmen in the fallen world of the city of man.[221] Rather, Augustine and Gregory maintained that the church, as well as Christians who find themselves in positions of power, have a responsibility to perpetually persuade those in power to use their power in accordance with *caritas.*[222] That is to say, individual Christians and the wider community of the church were not permitted to wash their hands of politics, but this did not mean that the church carried with it either the responsibility nor the expectation that the world could be ruled in accordance with perfect justice this side of the eschaton.[223] Augustine's eschatological view of peace, and his consequent reticence that worldly empires could ever establish the peace of Christ in the fallen world, came under pressure in the early fourteenth century. Debates like those between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair, those between John XXII and Marsilius of Padua, and the later views of John Wycliffe in England are representative of the shifting views concerning the possibility of a 'Christian king.'[224] In *Piers Plowman,* Conscience is represented at this early stage of the poem as a figure who has learned a sort of theocratic hope through Kynde Wit's teaching. This hope is for a well-ordered society grounded in 'o cristene kyng' who will not simply rule the world with moderate justice, but a perfect justice of love and peace,

> And o cristene kyng kepe vs echone.
>
> Shal no Mede be maistre neueremore aftur,

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[221] Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[222] Philip Kates, *The Two Swords: A Study in the Union of Church and State* (Washington, D.C.: St. Anselm's Priory, 1928).
[223] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity: A.D. 200-1000* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).
[224] Kates, *The Two Swords.*

Ac loue and lownesse and lewete togyderes –

Tho shal be maistres on molde, trewe men to helpe.

…

Batailes sholle neuere eft be ne man bere eg-toel

And yf eny smyth smethen hit, smyte therwith to dethe.[225]

This is a specific interpretation of Isaiah, a vision that Conscience is *taught* by none other than Kynde Wit. Kynde Wit's legacy in the poem is significant because he is the same figure who partners with Conscience to first order the realm under the rule of the king of the Prologue, the same king who rules by power given to him through the aristocracy and the might endorsed by knights, a king who is not unlike the king who similarly rules by might, 'bi his corone', in the penultimate passus. Thus, from beginning to end, Conscience is influenced by the teaching of Kynde Wit, holding out hope in 'o cristene kyng' capable of ruling society, church and realm, in accordance with perfect justice. As *Piers Plowman* unfolds, Langland's poetry teaches its audience how to evaluate Kynde Wit, his interpretation of Isaiah and his theocratic vision.

Langland offers at least two distinct figures who particularly challenge the extent to which the audience should trust the influence and teaching of Kynde Wit and the theocratic vision of ecclesiology and politics into which Kynde Wit catechizes Conscience.

§ Imaginatif, Clergie and the Limitations of Kynde Wit

[225] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* III.443-4, 475-6, [And one Christian king look after us all. / Meed shall nevermore be the master, But Love, Meekness, and Loyalty together / Shall be masters of this world, to help all true men. / … / There shall be no more battles, nor men bear blades, / And the smith that forges one struck to death with it].

The first figure the poem presents to offer extensive teaching concerning the limitations of Kynde Wit is Ymaginatif.[226] Ymaginatif does not deride the faculty of Kynde Wit as such, but rather insists that there are particular ends for which Kynde Wit proves incapable independent from the broader context of other necessary faculties or figures along a pilgrim's journey. Two passages from Ymaginatif's teaching are particularly relevant:

> So grace is a gifte of god and kynde wit a chaunce
>
> And clergie a connynge of kynde wittes techyng.
>
> And yut is clergie to comende for Cristes loue more
>
> Then eny connyng of kynde wit but clergi hit reule.[227]

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[226] Recent criticism varies significantly in its interpretation of Ymaginatif. James Simpson argues that Ymaginatif's analogies and imagistic arguments transcend apparent contradictions within Ymaginatif's own teaching as the poem's argument moves from *scientia* towards *sapientia* (*'Piers Plowman': An Introduction to the B Text,* (Longman, 1990), pp. 102-3, 136-9). See also his 'From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*', *Medium Aevum,* 55 (1986): 1-23. Other assessments suggesting that Ymaginatif transcends apparent contradictions in his teaching include A.J. Fletcher's 'The Social Trinity of *Piers Plowman*' *Review of English Studies,* 44:175 (1993): 343-61, and A.J. Minnis 'Langland's Ymaginatif and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination' *Comparative Criticism,* 3 (1981): 71-103. In contrast, Fiona Somerset rejects such positive assessments, arguing in *Clerical Discourse,* p. 44, 'it cannot be claimed that the poem moves smoothly from *scientia* to *sapientia,* or that Ymaginatif stands at the point of transition. … The inconsistency between the content and the method of Ymaginatif's defence seems to invite criticism rather than assent, and, instead of providing a medium between 'lewed' and 'clergie', to advertise the gap between them'. Somerset's argument suggests that Ymaginatif's own contradictions demonstrate a blindness to the tensions that I argued in chapter 1 lie within Aquinas's view of the church's hierarchical and benevolent teaching authority. For Somerset, the tension is evident in the paradox of a 'lewed clergie', the possibility of an ironically lay, or uneducated, or stupid clergy (a 'stupid learning'). Somerset writes, at p. 47, 'Ymaginatif is attempting to deal with the same difficulty with 'lewed clergie that Will and Piers have posed. Whereas they suggest it is possible for the 'lewed' to have 'clergie' through grace, Ymaginatif claims clerics are instrumental in the conferral of grace upon the 'lewed' by means of 'clergie.'' For Somerset, Ymaginatif fails to overcome the contradictions in his own 'hopeful solution, that the diffusion of 'clergie' might bring everyone to cultivate their own personal reform', because, for Somerset, Ymaginatif both names that not all clergy are without fault, and yet does not create a way for the 'lewed' to learn about the faults of the clergy and thereby recognize when the clergy (like Chaucer's Pardoner) might be leading them astray. My analysis below is less concerned with arguing for the virtue or incoherence of Ymaginatif's argument, and instead focuses on the way Langland's poetry instructs its audience in a particular way of understanding what a virtuous clergy might be and how one might recognize it.

[227] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XIV.33-6, 43, [So grace is a gift of God and common sense good luck / And learning an understanding of common sense's teaching. / And yet learning is to be commended for Christ's love more / Than any understanding of common sense unless learning rule it].

This first passage makes it clear that, at least for Ymaginatif, Kynde Wit bears a particular relation to Clergie, a term itself with a complex history.[228] At present, allow Clergie to stand as a placeholder for both *learning*, specifically, trained understanding and appreciation for the church's interpretation of Scripture and tradition across time that is connected to a person's salvation; and/or the *ordained clergy*, those who bear responsibility for sharing the church's clergie throughout broader society.[229] Kynde wit, so Ymaginatif teaches, is a chance, a matter of luck, while Clergie, or learning, is a particular form of knowing derived from Kynde Wit's teaching. Paradoxically, this same Clergie, which is some how derived from Kynde Wit's teaching, must also rule Kynde Wit in order for the two faculties to prove efficacious. This is evident at the end of this first passage when Ymagenatyf maintains that Clergie must be honored as a necessary component of properly formed Kynde Wit.

The potentially circuitous, perhaps even incoherent, representation of the relation between these faculties crystalizes in the second passage:

> Forthy Y conseile vch a creature clergie to honoure.
>
> For clergy is Cristes vycary to conforte and to cure;
>
> Both lewede and lerede were lost yf clergie ne were.
>
> Kynde-wittede men han a clergie by hemsulue;

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[228] Somerset, Fiona *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 13. See also Wendy Scase Piers Plowman *and the New Anti-clericalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[229] The Middle English Dictionary lists three broad definitions of 'clergie' including (1) The clergy (as distinguished from the laity); also, a particular group of clerics; the clergy of a country (as a political class); also, the prelates of the realm, the lords spiritual; the learned men of a country; the body of Christian people (2) clerical status or office; *law* benefit of clergy (3) knowledge, learning; doctrine; **pure** ~, higher learning, theology, divine inspiration; a branch of learning or study, a science; study; learned procedure, scholarly method; learned speech. *Middle English Dictionary* edited by Hans Kurath (University of Michigan Press: 1952-2001) accessed via the Middle English Compendium of the University of Michigan Library System, 14 February 2021: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED7987.

Of cloudes and of costumes they contreuede mony thynges

And marked hit in here manere and mused theron to knowe.

And of the selcouthes that thei sye, here sones therof thei tauhten

For they helden hit for an hey science here sotiltees to knowe.

As thorw here science sothly was neuere soule ysaued

Ne brouhte by here bokes to blisse ne to ioye.

For al here kynde knowing cam bote of diuerse syhtes,

Of briddes and of bestes, of blisse and of sorwe.

Patriarkes and prophetus repreuede here science

And saide here words ne here wysdomes was but a folye;

As to the clergie of Crist thei counted hit but a trifle.[230]

This passage admits the many extraordinary discoveries, identifications and patterns Kynde-wittede people are capable of deducing from the material world. Yet, Ymaginatif insists, Clergie is necessary beyond Kynde Wit because the science, words and wisdoms of these Kynde-wittede people are incapable of delivering humanity beyond temporal ends in the material world, 'As thorw here science sothly was neuere soule ysaued / Ne brouhte by here bokes to blisse ne to ioye.' That is to say, Kynde Wit proves incapable of delivering humanity beyond finite ends, and thus requires a form of Clergie capable of stretching Kynde Wit towards the supernatural end of eternal bliss.

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[230] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XIV.70-84, [Therefore I counsel every creature to honor learning, / For learning is Christ's vicar to comfort and to cure; / both the unlettered and learned would be lost if it weren't for learning. / Men of common sense have a learning by themselves; / Concerning clouds and customs they found out many things / And made notes in their manner and pondered them to understand. / And out of the strange things they saw they taught their sons about them / For they hold it high science their subtleties to know. / But surely through their science a soul was never saved / Nor brought by their books to bliss or to joy. / For all their natural knowing came only from diverse sightings / Of birds and beasts, of bliss and sorrow. / Patriarchs and prophets reproved their science / And said their words and wisdoms were mere folly; / Compared with Christ's learning they counted it a trifle].

The particular clergie, or learning, Ymaginatif advocates is not learning in the abstract, but specifically related to clerks and a form of learning that comes through the church. Ymaginatif illustrates this through a riddle about two strong men thrown into the Thames.[231] When previously subsumed by Rechlessness, Will had denounced the value of human agency constitutive of both clergie and books and furthermore reduced grace to a random act of fortune.[232] Ymaginatif here challenges Will for, 'How thou contraridest Clergie with crabbed wordes, / That is, how lewede men and luyther lyhtloker were ysaued / Then connynge clerkes of kynde vnderstondynge.'[233] Ymaginatif's riddle subverts Will's previous reduction of grace to a mere random act of fortune, by asking which of the two strong men thrown into the Thames, one who knows how to swim and the other who does not, has most to fear. The riddle problematizes Will's previous assessment that the human agency involved in learning is irrelevant in the face of predestination. Will admits that the person who does not know how to swim has most to fear. Ymaginatif then compares this analogy with clerks who know both what sin is and how contrition heals as its remedy over and against those 'lewede' men who lack such learning. The later must wait, lying still, presumably at the bottom of the Thames, drowning, until Lent for confession when they are directed by clerks in the penitential practice necessary to receive absolution.[234] The fate of such 'lewede' men who must wait for Lent to confess reveals a further aspect of Ymaginatif's teaching,

There the lewede lyth stille and loketh aftur lente

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[231] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.104-30.
[232] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.281, 'Sothly,' saide Rechlessnesse, 'ye se by many euydences / That wit ne witnesse wan neuere the maistrie / Withoute the gifte of god which is grace of fortune.'
[233] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.100-2, ['How you contradicted Clergy with cantankerous words, / That is, how unlearned and bad men were more readily saved / Than clever clerks of natural understanding'].
[234] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton University Press, 1977).

And hath no contricion ar he come to shrift, and thenne can he lytel telle,
But as his loresman hym lereth byleueth and troweth,
And that is aftur his person other his parsche preest, and parauntur bothe lewede
To lere lewede men, as Luk bereth witnesse:
Dum cecus ducit cecum, &c.[235]

While, Ymaginatif endorses clergie as 'Cristes vycary to conforte and to cure' he does not endorse clerks without a caution. It is possible, Ymaginatif imagines, that both one's parson and parish priest are 'bothe lewede', nothing more than the blind leading the blind. In a mode reminiscent of Conscience's previously qualified assessment of the cardinals who might lack cardinal virtues in the Prologue, Ymaginatif only endorses clerks who have learning while warning against clerks who lack it.[236] As such, Ymaginatif here exhorts all people to clergie for the sake for their salvation to protect themselves from being hopelessly bound to 'lewede' parsons and parish priests. For Ymaginatif, pilgrims should not depend blindly on the work of clerks to deliver them to the knowledge necessary for salvation, but must instead take responsibility and learn the meaning of both sin and contrition lest they drown in the meantime between Easter and Lent. This figure, as it turns out, is, like Chaucer, seriously concerned with the objection Aquinas raised regarding the way people of lower degree might be protected against errant clerks through their simple faith.

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[235] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.120-4, [Whereas the unlettered man lies still and waits for Lent / And has no contrition before he comes to confession, and then can tell little, / Believes and trusts only as his teacher directs him, / And that's according to his parson or parish priest, and maybe both lack the learning / To teach unlearned men, as Luke testifies: / *If the blind lead the blind, etc.*].
[236] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.120-5.

Ymaginatif is clearly concerned that both a parson and a parish priest might both be 'lewed.' Thus, Ymaginatif counsel's all people to take some degree of responsibility for their own 'clergie', as is evidenced by the parable of the two swimmers in the Thames. However, it is by no means clear that Ymaginatif understands 'clergie' as a purely human act apart from grace. Indeed, that is how Kynde Wit is portrayed. While Somerset may question any clear positive proposal from Ymaginatif's as to how people might acquire 'clergie' in the face of 'lewed clergie', this assumes that acquiring 'clergie' is a human act apart from grace.[237] As such, Somerset's critique asks Ymaginatif to provide the impossible, a way that human beings can save themselves apart from grace. The 'clegrie' Ymaginatif deems necessary for salvation is not reduceable to a perfect human teacher, priest, curriculum, or institution. Rather, the 'clergy' Ymaginatif deems necessary for salvation is the 'clergie' that is 'Christ's vycary to conforte and to cure.'[238] This is a mystical *sapiential* 'clergie' which pertains to the cure and salvation of souls through grace. Such is a 'clergie' that is beyond human prescription or control, and thus Ymaginatif offers something both appropriate and profound by refusing to resolve the puzzle of how and from whom the 'lewed' might gain the 'clergie' necessary for salvation if/when faced with a 'lewed clergie.'

Consequently, Ymaginatif problematizes Kynde Wit while simultaneously raising another difficult question. Ymaginatif teaches that Kynde Wit must be coupled with and shaped by clergie in order for the faculty to be edifying. In addition, clergie is to be sought not only through clerks, but also through a person's own study and commitment to know both sin and contrition. How one might seek clergie in the face of the proposition

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[237] Somerset, Fiona *Clerical Discourse*, p. 50.
[238] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.70.

that some clerks may lack it, *and* that clergie itself is a form of knowing that requires a guide, is not addressed at this point in the poem.[239] Instead, like Conscience's assessment in the Prologue, a problem is raised and the audience will have to continue on in order to discern how to negotiate this challenge. The raising of this particular problem at this moment in the poem's narrative structure does, however, prepare the audience to make a judgment about Conscience's decision to dismiss clergie, and to later appreciate the consequences this action has when Conscience is instructed by Kynde Wit, and unaided by clergie, in the ordering of Vnity.[240] The capacity and limitations of Kynde Wit are, however, commented on by another voice in the poem, which deserves analysis.

§ The Samaritan's Warning

The Samaritan, a figure with even more authority than Ymaginatif, offers his own discrete teaching concerning unaided Kynde Wit. The narrative moment in which the Samaritan does so provides not only a substantive assessment of unaided Kynde Wit, but one which is heightened by the particular dialectic made possible by the narrative form of the moment.

In Passus XIX, Will asks the Samaritan if all that Abraham and *Spes* taught him about the Trinity and love of enemies is true. The Samaritan answers plainly,

> 'A [*Spes*] saide soeth,' quod the Samaritaen, 'and so Y [Samaritan] rede the also.
>
> …

[239] See Wendy Scase *'Pier Plowman' and the New Anti-clericalsim* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1989), p. 41. Scase shows that this cluster of questions is not limited to the internal ruminations of *Piers Plowman*, but also occupied the minds of many near contemporaries from Aquinas to Jon Pecham Archbishop of Canterbury (1287) and the Dominican Friar Richard Helmsley (1380) who lamented that of the eighty curates in the diocese of Durham 'not one could read from the gospel during mass without error.'
[240] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XV.176-84, XXI.361.

> And yf Kynde Wit carpe here-ayen or eny kyne thouhtes
> Or eretikes with argumentis, thien hoend thow hem shewe.'[241]

Here, the Samaritan affirms their teaching and offers Will two analogies: that of his own hand and that of a taper. These images the Samaratin offers are to combat Kynde Wit, or any heretics, who might teach him contrary to these two truths which are beyond the capacity of natural reason unaided by divine revelations, namely the Trinity and the moral imperative to love enemies. This Samaritan, who is an allegorical figure of Christ, stands as an inchoate answer to the question raised by Ymaginatif's investigation of clergie. This Christ figure stands as the teacher of the form of clergie that Will needs for the cure and salvation of his soul. I say that this figure stands as an inchoate answer to Ymaginatif's investigation of clergie because Will here receives a teaching *directly* from an *allegorical* figuration of Christ. As such, the teaching is both direct, and yet mediated. Christ speaks directly to Will, but only as one simultaneously cloaked in the mystery and imaginative veil of allegory. This is a sort of direct, yet veiled, teaching reminiscent of the resurrected Christ's teaching offered to Mary Magdalene in John's Gospel, and Luke's portrayal of the resurrected Christ's encounter with the disciples along the road to Emmaus.[242] Similarly, the teaching authority of Christ represented by the Samaritan in Passus XIX of *Piers Plowman* is paradoxically represented as both direct and also mediated. For the hasty reader who skips over this puzzle and rushes ahead to evidence in this figure Langland's predisposition to regard the church's teaching authority as a direct

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[241] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.108-12, ['He told the truth,' said the Samaritan, 'and I advise you so, too. / And if Common Sense or any kind of thoughts speak to the contrary / Or heretics with arguments, you just show them your hand].
[242] See respectively John 20:11-8, Luke 24:13-35.

mediation of Christ rather than a complex series of mediations of clergie offered through clerks, parish priests or parsons, the following scene accommodates the impatient.

The Samaritan's encounter with *Semyuief* challenges any attempt to reduce the clergie necessary for salvation to a person, curriculum, or institution. Langland portrays the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan and represents the Samaritan as an allegorical Christ figure. Along the road, Langland describes *Semyuief* who lies,

> …ybounde…
> For he ne myhte stepe ne stande ne stere foet ne hands
> Ne helpe hymsulue sothly fo *semyuief* he semede
> And as naked as an nedle and noen helpe abouten.[243]

There is both consonance and dissonance between this figure and the two strong men of Ymaginatif's riddle. Langland recalls the figures in Ymaginatif's riddle by describing *Semyuief* in precisely the same way as the strongmen thrust into the Thames, 'naked as an nedle.'[244] The poetry here intentionally recalls the puzzles of Ymaginatif's teaching concerning the role and means of human agency in the acquisition of the clergie necessary for salvation. *Semyuief* is like the figure in Ymaginatif's riddle who does not know how to swim because *Semyuief* lies bound and completely unable to help himself. The puzzle takes on increasing urgency here in Passus XIX because *Semyuief* is in imminent mortal danger. The Samaritan 'perseued by [*Semyuief*'s] poues he was in perel

[243] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.54-9, […bound / a man … / For he could neither step nor stand nor stir a foot or hands / Nor help himself in any way, for he seemed *semyuief,* / And as naked as a needle and no help about].
[244] Compare XIX.57 'And as naked as an nedle and noen helpe abouten' with XIV.105 'And bothe naked as a nedle...'

to deye / And bote if he hadde recouerer the rather that ryse sholde he neuere.'[245] Ymaginatif entertains the possibility that the unfit swimmer could somehow survive lying underneath the waters of the Thames between annual Lenten instruction from a clerk regarding the meaning of sin and the habits of contrition providing the grace necessary to swim out of sin.[246] In contrast, the Samaritan perceives *Semyuief* as not only incapable of helping himself, but also in urgent danger of death. Lying for a moment longer will lead to death. Rushing to his aid, the Samaritan soothes *Semyuief*'s wounds and leads him away from the market to a grange and leaves him with an inn-keeper to look after his wounds.[247]

Though bandaged and in a safer place, the Samaritan explains to Will that *Semyuief* will not survive

> Withoute the bloed of that barn enbaumed and ybaptised.
> And thouh he stande and steppe, riht stronge worth he neuere
> Til he haue eten al that barn and his bloed drunken
> And yut be plasterud with pacience when fondynges hym priketh –
> …
> Andyut bote they leue lelly vpon that litel baby,
> That hi lycame shal lechen at the laste vs alle.[248]

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[245] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.68-9.
[246] Presumably this bad swimmer can hold his/her breath for months?
[247] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.68-75.
[248] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.86-91, 94-5, [He'll not be saved without the blood of a child, / A child that must be born of a maid, / And with the blood of that child anointed and baptized. / And though he stand up and take a step, he'll never get strong / Till he has eaten all that child and drunk his blood, / And moreover be poulticed with patience when tempations excite him, / … / And further unless they believe loyally in that little child, / That his body will heal us all in the end.], trans. George Economou *William Langland's* Piers Plowman: *A verse translation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 174.

Semyuief's survival depends not only upon the initial, direct aid of the Samaritan, nor the care of the inn-keeper at the grange, but also *Semyuief*'s full Eucharistic participation in this child. The care of both *Semyuief*'s body and soul which is necessary for salvation includes complex and interconnected layers of mediation, a prescription that includes the church, its sacraments, and clerks, as well as the mystical presence of Christ in and through those mediations of grace. In this way, the Samaritan does not advocate an unmediated clergie at all. There is no perfect institution, person or syllabus of teaching capable of conferring the healing *Semyuief* so desperately needs. Instead, only a clergie understood in the mystical or *sapiential* sense of God's saving grace extended and mediated through Christ and clerks sharing the sacraments, catechesis, and complimented by the fellowship of those at the grange is capable to save this one left for dead by the roadside. This is a thoroughly mediated and mystical rendering of clergie that also includes human agency to participate in the forms of healing Christ offers. Only a 'clergie' that includes Christ's mediated presence at every step of the way *and Semyuief*'s full participation at ever increasing degrees in the church and all its sacraments might this figure have life.

It is important here to note the creative expansion Langland's poetry gives to typical fourteenth century usage of 'clergie.' As is true for theologians, including Augustine and Aquinas, so it is true for Langland that there exists a deep analogy between how human beings come to *know* God and how human beings are *saved, healed and united to* God. The journey towards knowing God includes something beyond human 'natural' capacity because for the finite human being to acquire knowledge of the infinite God will require an expansion, or as Aquinas might say a 'perfection', of the natural

human capacity through the gift of grace. Knowledge, for Aquinas and so for Langland, is perfected by the gift of the theological virtue of faith. Langland's exploration of this mystical, sapiential form of 'clergie' gestures to Langland's profound commitment to the ways in which knowledge of God is given *both* through the theological gift of faith that is beyond human nature *and* also the gift that includes mediation through the tradition, teachers and clerks of Christ's body the Church. Here Langland expands the semantic register for 'clergie' beyond the ordained clergy, beyond clerical status or office, beyond knowledge acquired through learning, in order to re-present a vision of 'clergie'that is already and necessarily infused with God's grace wedded in Christological communion with the Church. Indeed, as will be argued explicitly in chapters 2.2 and 3, Langland's robust vision of the Church as the body of Christ upon the altar and the body of Christ as the Church united under the mystery of the sacrament proves to be the ultimate mystical and sapiential 'clergie' necessary to draw God's beloved into knowledge and union with God.

Ymaginatif's teaching insists that Kynde Wit is incapable without the aid of clergie, while the Samaritan goes a step further and warns that Kynde Wit may at times contradict the core teachings of the Christian faith regarding the Trinity and the love of enemies. Ymaginatif's teaching raises a vexing question for Will, if clergie requires a guide and clerks cannot all be trusted, how might Will discover a trustworthy guide? The Samaritan's treatment and diagnosis of *Semyuief* offer a possible answer, one which is repeated and affirmed later in the poem. Christ is both the trustworthy guide and the way who is alone capable of confirming and sustaining the pilgrim who receives the challenging teachings of the Christian faith which often contradict the impulses of Kynde

Wit. However, as the Samaritan teaches, Christ's guidance is not unmediated, nor can human beings ever secure control over it. Rather, the clergie that leads to salvation is revealed in ever increasing degrees as pilgrims grow and learn to participate more fully in the Eucharistic life of Christ through the church and all its sacraments. Always hesitant to risk collapsing the sign and the signified, *Piers Plowman* opens the imaginative space for what this might look like only as an alternative to the ecclesiology Conscience will chose in the poem's close.

§ The Consequences of Conscience without Clergie

The model of clergie and the ecclesiology outlined through the teaching of Ymaginatif and the Samaritan are absent in the closing two passus of the poem. Conscience's decision to dismiss Clergie in Passus XV freights the instruction Conscience receives from Kynde Wit in Passus XXI. This is because the guidance Kynde Wit offers Conscience in the penultimate passus leads these two figures to form a church that grates against not only Ymaginatif's teaching regarding the necessity of clergie, but also the Samaritan's teaching regarding the necessity of enemy love and full participation in the Eucharist.

Kynde Wit again comes 'to teche' Conscience following a long sequence figuring Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has descended upon 'many hundred' crying 'Helpe vs, Crist, of grace!' in the face of anti-christ's imminent attack.[249] The peoples' invocation brings Grace who leads Piers and Conscience, urging them to call forth the commons and receive instruction. Grace orders a society in which Conscience is crowned king and

[249] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.211-2.

Craft his steward.[250] Grace makes Piers his 'procuratour' and 'reue' to keep and register *redde quod debes*.[251] Grace equips Piers with the four Gospels along with the church fathers to till the earth, as well as seeds, the four cardinal virtues, to plant among the people. Before setting out into the world with Piers for their evangelistic mission, Grace builds a barn in which to store the ripened grain, the allegorical figuration of those persons well cultivated through baptism and discipleship planted and tilled by Grace and Piers. As this plan is being set, Pride redoubles his attack, warning Conscience,

> 'And Peres berne worth broke and thei that ben in Vnite
> Shal come oute, Consience, and youre two caples,
> Confession and Contricioun, and youre carte the bileue
> Shal be coloured so queyntly and keuered vnder oure sophistrie
> That Consience shal nat knowe ho is cristene or hethene
> Ne no manere marchaunt that with moneye deleth
> Where he wynne with riht, with wrong or with vsure!'[252]

Pride here warns that he will succeed in veiling, concealing, members of the church in such a way that Conscience will not be able to discern the difference between Christians and heathens, between those who earn justly and those who practice usury.[253] In response, Conscience calls the commons into Piers' barn, 'Vnity', fearing that the people are incapable of defending themselves against Pride's attack without Grace, who is,

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[250] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.256.
[251] [repayment of what is owed].
[252] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.344-350, ['And Piers' barn will be broken into, and those inside Unity / Will come out, and Conscience and your two horses / Confession and Contrition, and your cart the Faith / Will be colored co cunningly and covered with our sophistry / That Conscience will not know (by contrition or confession) who's Christian or heathen, / Nor any manner of merchant who deals with money / Whether he earns rightly, wrongly, or with usury'].
[253] David Aers, 'Piers Plowman and the End of the Cardinal Virtues' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (2012) 42:1: 59-81.

perhaps confusingly, not in 'Vnity' but rather roaming the world with Piers cultivating truth.[254] At this moment, 'thenne cam Kynde Wit Consience to teche.'[255]

Kynde Wit's teaching is concise but powerful as it recalls Conscience's previous courtly catechesis and his theocratic hope for both church and realm,

> And thenne cam Kynde Wit Consience to teche
> And cryede and comaundede alle cristene peple
> To deluen a dich depe aboute Vnite
> That holi churches stoed in holinesse as hit were a pile.[256]

With the church established as a peel-tower, or fortress, Conscience receives Grace's kingly appointment in terms of courtly and temporal power. Conscience's long-harboured theocratic hope, grounded in Kynde Wit's initial interpretation of Isaiah in Passus III, here significantly influences the direction of his counsel. Conscience's interpretation of what it will mean for him to be king is over-determined by his previous catechesis at court, now void of the instruction of clergie whom Conscience dismissed.[257] Not only is his understanding of a good king militarized, but it also leads him to attempt to maintain the status quo order of society in hopes that his leadership will infuse the people with the grace necessary for them to be a Christian people. At no point does Conscience question the contradiction between the militarized fortress church he is forming and the Samaritan's moral imperative of enemy love as a core component of Christian faith. In the fog and urgency of Pride's attack, Conscience fails to remember the readily accessible

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[254] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.355-9.
[255] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.360.
[256] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.360-3, [And then Common Sense came to teach Conscience / And cried and commanded all Christian people / To dig a deep ditch around Unity / So that Holy Church stood in holiness as if it were a fort.].
[257] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XV.175-84.

images of his own hand, or a taper, which the Samaritan provided as resources to recall the clergie of Christ necessary to challenge Kynde Wit.

Conscience's understanding of Grace's language of kingship, however, is not the only available interpretation by this point in the poem's narrative. At the opening of this same passus, the terms of self-sacrifice and mercy through which Christ's Passion reorders language and thereby makes it possible for 'knyht, kyng, conquerer may be o persone' reconstitute Conscience's own attempt to interpret what it means to refer to Christ as a king.[258] However, this momentary glimpse of the grammatical implications of the Incarnation prove insufficient to counteract the prior influence of Conscience's theocratic hope as taught by Kynde Wit. Void of 'clergie', Grace's ordination of a missional evangelistic church, active and moving to till and sow throughout the world cultivating grain that might one day be worth storing in a vulnerable barn of martyrdom, is swept away by the theology and politics of Kynde Wit's teaching of kingship, and the fortifications necessary to maintain it. In the face of the crisis that is anti-christ's siege, Conscience, unable to remember the only clergie capable of reversing Kynde Wit's influence, depends not on Grace and the witness of Christ, but upon the now old fantasy that society may be well ordered if led by 'o cristene kyng.' This king is now none other than Conscience himself. The image of ecclesial life as mobile, evangelistic and as vulnerable as a crop and as defenseless as a barn is replaced by the promised security of a fortress and the forms of violence necessary to defend it.

Taking on this vision of kingship, politics and ecclesiology, Conscience orders the people to dig a moat around his fortress church to keep out 'commune women' as well as

[258] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.27, [a juror and summoner who always lied under oath].

'a sisour and a sompnour that weren forsworen ofte.'[259] That this action of fortifying the church against these 'sinners' grates against the Samaritan's moral imperative of enemy love is heightened by the shape of the poetry that follows,

> Ther ne was cristene creature that kynde wit hadde
> Saue shrews one swiche as Y spak of
> That he ne halpe a quantite holinesse to wexe.[260]

The breaks between these lines are explosive. The first line stands awkwardly on its own. Is it the case, as George Economou's translation renders it, that 'There was no Christian creature who had common sense [Kynde Wit],'[261] drawing dissonance between the members of this fortress church led by Kynde Wit, and those who might authentically claim the title 'Christian'? The second line, left out in Economou's translation, punctuates the question by extending the pause. Read together these two lines wax satirical, 'There was no Christian creature who had common sense [Kynde Wit] / except wicked folk alone such as I speak of.' Have the members of this fortress church guided by Kynde Wit become wicked? Are those who follow Kynde Wit as their teacher and yet who reside in 'Vnity' actually wicked? The third line brings the only resolution capable of settling the tension, 'That he ne halpe a quantite holinesse to wexe.' So it would seem that the wicked in question are in fact the 'common women…a sisour and a sompnour', not those Christians following Kynde Wit's teaching who help holiness grow behind fortified walls. While the alliteration in the following lines tempt the audience by the

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[259] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.367, 369, […a juror and summoner who always lied under oath].
[260] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.372-4, [There was no Christian creature who had common sense / That didn't help holiness grow to some degree].
[261] George Economou, *William Langland's* Piers Plowman: *A verse translation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 206.

confirmation of these assumptions, *Piers Plowman* has previously trained its audience to pay close attention to lines which pile up questions while only offering an apparent resolution through a long delayed line.[262] As with Conscience's accusations of the church of the Prologue, the following lines matter, particularly insofar as they will either succeed or fail to bear the weight of this delayed, and perhaps only apparent, resolution.

The Christians who grow in holiness within fortress church do so through a series of practices,

> Somme thorw bedes-biddynge and somme bi pilgrimages
> Or other priue penaunses and somme thorw pans-delyng.
> And thenne walled watur for wikked werkes,
> Egrelich ernynge oute at menne yes.
> Clannesse of the comune and clerkes clene lyuynge
> Made Vnite holi churche in holinesse stande.[263]

The independent efficacy of these very practices has previously been questioned in the poem, and in this moment Langland again comments on their insufficiency independent of Christ and the practices which mystically confer Christ to those wounded by sin.[264] Specifically, the same practices the Samaritan affirmed to be constitutive for *Semyiuef*'s survival, especially full participation in the Eucharist. The holiness made possible through prayers for the dead, pilgrimages, private penances, alms-giving, and clerics'

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[262] How can one possibly pay attention to the substantive claims of an utterance constituted of a cadence like, "Clannesse of the comune and clerkes clene lyuynge"? See Macklin Smith 'Langland's Alliterative Lines' *Yearbook of Langland Studies* (2009) 23: 163-216.
[263] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.375-80, [Some through praying and pilgrimages / Or others by private penances and some through alms-giving. / And then water welled up for wicked deeds, / Stinging as it's running out of men's eyes. Purity of the common people and cleric's clean living / Made Unity, Holy Church, stand in holiness].
[264] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.220-4.

clean living is qualified, undermined, as it proves incapable on its own to shape a people desirous of Christ and participating fully in Christ through the Eucharist. This failure is demonstrated in the powerful and alarming reaction of the people to Conscience's invitation to the altar.

Overconfident in the holiness these practices have formed among the people behind the walls, Conscience calls the commons to share in the Eucharist,

> 'Cometh,' quod Consience, 'ye cristene, dyneth
> That haen labored lelly al this lenten tyme.
> Here is bred yblessed and godes body therunder.
> Grace thorw godes word gaf Peres the plouhman power,
> Myhte to make hit and men for to eten hit aftur
> In helpe of here hele ones in a monthe
> Or as ofte as they hadden nede, tho that hadden payed
> To Peres pardon the plouhman *Redde quod debes*.'[265]

To this invitation into a Eucharistic form of life, a life that invites the people to forgive each other and make restitution in response to the One who forgives and settles all humanity's debt, the same life the Samaritan himself previously confirmed to be absolutely crucial for *Semyiuef*'s survival, the people protest. It is not simply that they reject the stipulations of the meal Conscience offers, but more specifically that the terms in which they reject it reveal the insufficiency of the holiness, habits and assumptions underpinning the fortress church brought into being by way of a Kynde Wit and

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[265] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.381-90, ['Come,' Conscience said, 'you Christians, and eat, / Who have labored loyally all this Lenten time. / Here is a blessed bread and God's body there-under. / Through God's word Grace gave Piers plowman power, / Might to make it and men to partake of it / In help of their health once a month / Or as often as needed, those who had paid / To Piers the plowman's pardon *Redde quod debes.*'].

Conscience unaided by Clergie. That is to say, the form of the people's rejection of this meal cast the entire edifice of Conscience's fortress church into question. To Conscience, the people shout,

> 'How?' quod alle the comune, 'thow conseylest vs to yelde
> Al that we owen eny wyhte or that we go to hosele?'
> 'That is my conseil,' quod Consience, 'and cardinale virtues,
> Or vch man foryeue other, and that wol the *pater-noster*,
> *Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, &c*.
> And so to ben assoiled and sennes to be hoseled
> 'Ye? bawe!' quod a breware, 'Y wol nat be yruled,
> By Iesu! for al youre iangelyng, aftur *Spiritus iusticie*
> Ne aftur Consience, bi Crist, while Y can sulle
> Bothe dregges and draf and drawe at on hole
> Thikke ale and thynne ale; and that is my kynde
> And nat to hacky aftur holinesse – hold thy tonge, Consience!
> Of *Spiritus iusticie* thow spekest moche an ydel.'[266]

The people's response, so powerfully focused in that of the Brewer, reveals the insufficiency of the formation and catechesis affected behind the walls of Conscience's fortress church. Langland makes this point by cascading irony and juxtaposition. The

[266] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.393-402, ['Come again?' said the common people, 'you counsel us to give back / All that we owe anybody before going to communion?' / 'That's my advice', said Conscience, and the cardinal virtues'; / Or each man forgive the other, as the *pater noster* asks, / *And forgive us our debts*. / And so to be absolved and afterwards take communion.' / 'Oh, yeah?' said a brewer, 'I won't be ruled, / By Jesus! despite all your fast-talk, according to *Spiritus iusticie* / Nor according to Conscience, by Christ, as long as I can sell / Both dregs and swill and draw at one hole / Thick ale or thin ale; that's the kinf of guy I am / And not to poke around for holiness – so just shut up, Conscience! / Your *Spiritus iusticie* speech is a lot of hot air!'].

people stand together, as Christians? as a church?, refusing to be ruled 'By Iesu!' The people refuse the Eucharistic life Christ offers back to the people as necessary for the salvation of their souls. Christ is rejected as the people's king, as is His way of life, a Eucharistic life patterned by restitution, forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead, the people prefer lives of deceit in their small-scale trades. They prefer marginal profits won through manipulating their fellows over and against confession, forgiveness and corporate reconciliation. The people have become the embodiment of Dame Study's scathing critique, a people who mock the Eucharistic meal with gluttony and heresy and for whom,

'Wysdom and wit now is nat worth a carse
Bote hit be cardet with coueytise as clotheres kemben here wolle.'
…
Forthy, Wit,' quod she, 'be waer holy writ to shewe
Amonges hem that haen hawes at wille,
The which is a lykyng and a luste, the loue of the world.'[267]

The final passus of *Piers Plowman* depicts the further dissolution of this fortress church as Conscience, finally calls out to a Clergie who never arrives.[268] The vacuum created by Conscience's need and the absence of clergie is filled by friars, figures who Conscience receives with reserved judgment.[269] Without sufficient aide from clergie, this fortress church begins to crumble from within as 'Ypocrisye at the yate harde gan fyhte /

[267] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.5-80, [Wisdom and wit now are not worth a cress / Unless carded with covetousness, as clothiers comb wool. … 'Therefore Wit', she said, ' be wary of showing holy writ / Among those that have husks to their fill, / Which is delight and desiring and love of this world.'].
[268] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.228.
[269] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.230-308.

And wonded wel wykkedly many a wys techare.'[270] Desperate for some relief for the people of Vnity that might revive their efforts against the siege, Conscience, on Contrition's advice, goes against his previous judgment of the friars and allows Friar Flattery to be brought into Vnity. This moment is not a temporary lapse in judgment, but rather a demonstration of the consequences of Kynde Wit's influence. Without clerige, Conscience is unable to sustain reasoned discourse. Conscience's previous judgment of the friars makes his admission of Friar Flattery incomprehensible, and this is precisely the point. The narrative structure of Langland's poetry demonstrates that Conscience, as informed by Kynde Wit without clergie is incapable of reasoned discourse, either with Contrition or with himself. The decision to admit Friar Flattery is non-sensical, and that is precisely the point.

Once inside, Friar Flattery's work is performed quickly and effectively. He intoxicates the people such that they forget what sin is, 'The frere with his fisyk this folk hath enchaunted / And doth men drynke dwale, that they drat no synne.'[271] The siege is complete, Conscience abandons the church in search of Grace and Piers, and commentators have spilled much ink wondering whether or not Langland thereby gives voice to some sort of proto-protestant sentiment.[272] However, the argument can be made that the long processes of *Piers Plowman,* and the subtle poetic description of the influences Conscience receives over the course of the poem, invites the audience to ask a far more interesting series of questions. The poem invites the audience to consider just how this form of church is formed and how it might be identified. This chapter

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[270] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XXII.301-2, [Hypocrisy began to fight hard at the gate / And inflicted major wounds on many a wise teacher.].
[271] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XXII.378-9, [The Friar's enchanted these people with his treatments / And gives them sleeping potions so they fear no sin.].
[272] See James Simpson *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

demonstrates some examples of the way in which Langland teaches his audience to discern the collapse of the church as a correlative of at least two errors on behalf of Conscience. The first involves an errant hope in the possibility ‘o cristen king’, whether that be one of the many king’s in the poem who assert their right to the crown, or Conscience’s own attempt to rule over the church. *Piers Plowman* teaches its audience how the aspiration for a figure who might rule church and realm according to perfect justice this side of the eschaton is a dangerous illusion. The second is bound up in the epistemological misstep Conscience makes by dismissing Clergie and attempting to rule according to the dictates of Kynde Wit. In this way, *Piers Plowman* offers Ymaginatif and the Samaritan as examples of a mystical *sapiental* form of ‘clergie’ that is both Christological and also mediated through the church, its sacraments and priests. Such ‘clergie’, however, is not controlled or proscribed by any institution or practice, but rather employed by Christ to confer salvation.

Chapter 2.2

How far 'turned'?: Langland and the limits of sin

Piers Plowman offers multiple moments which seem to endorse the possibility that human beings created in the *imago dei* can be so devastated by sin as to become irredeemable. This is the possibility that the link between God and humanity (Creator and creature, which is original and also taken up and redeemed through the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ) is itself capable of being completely severed. Such a break would not only reduce a human creature below the level of human but also beyond the reach of divine mercy. This unorthodox possibility haunts the poem not only in specific scenes, but also through the broader arch of the poem's narrative and contributes to the dark tenor of the work's final representation of the church. Indeed, Conscience's final cry punctuates the coming to be of *Librium Arbitrium*'s anxiety. An anxiety not only that Conscience might be turned, but that the turning of Conscience might be one of many turnings which result in the turning of a whole society. For *Librium Arbitrium*, the sinister irony he fears is that these turnings might be achieved through the machinations of a corrupt church ruled by persons wholly consumed by sin to form the world in evil:

> As holiness and honestee out of holy churche
> Spryngeth and spredeth and enspireth the peple

Thorw parfit preesthoed and prelates of holy churche,

Riht so oute of holy churche al euel spredeth

There inparfit preestboed is, prechares and techares.[273]

In this chapter, four specific figures are examined through whom *Piers Plowman* demonstrates the capacity of sin to corrupt the *imago dei* in a human person. Specifically, Gloutton, Couetyse, the Brewer, and finally Will. First, however, the Samaritan's teaching on this topic serves as a sort of plumb line Langland uses to demonstrate the limits and possibilities of sin's effects. Following an analysis of the Samaritan's perspective on the corruptive potential of sin, Gloutton, Couetyse, the Brewer, and Will shall be examined in detail to demonstrate Langland's representation of figures whose witness and experience of total conversion place pressure upon the Samaritan's teaching. The tensions that emerge through reading the Samaritan's teaching alongside these instances of the poem's investigation of sin and its effects, prepare the poem's audience for the context in which they must receive Langland's advocacy for specific resources, practices and habits of mind which the poem deems to be constitutive of salvation. That is to say, analyzing the poem's representation of sin and its effects as exhibited through these particular figures opens up a more complex mode of reading the poem's view of sin and the way Langland imagines the church to participate in the mediation of grace. Furthermore, these representations of sin and grace contribute to the subtlety with which the poem teaches pilgrims to discern and negotiate rival claims to ecclesial authority.

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[273] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.242-7, [As holiness and honesty out of Holy Church / Spring and spread and inspire the people / Through perfect priesthood and prelates of Holy Church, / Just so out of Holy Church all evil spreads / Where imperfect priesthood is, preachers and teachers], trans. George Economou *William Langland's* Piers Plowman: *A verse translation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 148.

§ The Samaritan

As an allegorical figuration of Christ, the Samaritan's teaching in Passus XIX stands as one of the most authoritative voices in the poem. The particular grammar of grace the Samaritan offers through the image of the torch, or taper, provides a sort of theological plumb line concerning the poem's representation for the potential a person has to completely loose the *imago dei.* The Samaritan's teaching develops the much more concise grammar of grace previously offered by Ymaginatif and provides a lens through which to read the poem's representations of sin and its possible effects upon the *imago dei* in the human person.

The Samaritan's teaching on grace does not explicitly name the *imago dei*, but instead focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of restitution and the consequences of 'vnkyndenesse.' The Samaritan's development of these overlapping themes offers an important contribution or lens through which to read other moments in the poem that depict the possibility of 'vnkynde creatures', that is persons so conformed, or turned, by sin as to become void of the *imago dei* and thereby utterly separated from God.

The Samaritan begins by drawing an analogical comparison between the intwined interworking of a torch or taper whose,

> …wex and weke and warm fuyr togyderes
> Fostren forth a flaume and feyr lye
> That serueth this swynkares to see by a nyhtes,
> So doth the sire and the sone and the seynt spirit togyderes
> Fostren forth amonges folke fyn loue and bileue

That alle kyne cristene clanseth of synne.[274]

Divine illumination and the warmth of love and belief are emanations of the Triune God working in and through people by the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Samaritan admits, at times 'The blase be yblowen out, yut brenneth the weke – / Withouten leye of lihte lith fuyr in the mache.'[275] This image of an extinguished yet latent flame is the description the Samaritan uses to describe 'vnkynde creatures':

So is the holi gost god and grace withouten mercy

To alle vnkynde creatures that coueyten to destruye

Leel lycame and lyf that oure lord shupte.[276]

While the phrase 'extinguished yet latent' might seem incomprehensible in terms of deductive reasoning, it is conceivable by way of Langland's poetic representation. That is to say, the image is conceptually feasible, albeit difficult if not impossible, to describe in terms of distinctions leading to clear categories.[277] Through this inductive, poetic or fitting mode of representation, Langland's poetry aims to open up the space for a sort of absence, yet an absence that is never as absolute as the much deeper and more real presence of grace. For, according to the Samaritan, it is the Holy Spirit which is the most kynde element within the human being, without which humans are completely incapable of the love and belief brought on through divine illumination and warmth.[278]

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[274] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.175-80, […wax and wick and warm fire together / Foster forth a flame and fair glow / That serves these laborers to see by at night, / So do the Sire and the Son and the Holy Spirit together / Foster forth among the folk fine love and belief / That cleanses of sin all kinds of Christians].
[275] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.181-2.
[276] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.184-6, [So is the Holy Ghost and grace without mercy / To all unnatural creatures who long to destroy / Loyal body and life that our Lord shaped].
[277] For Langland, and the theological tradition in which he is writing, it is entirely possible for arguments to be sufficient on the grounds, not of syllogistic logic, but in terms of 'fittingness' as it might have been expressed by both Aquinas and Anselm.
[278] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.217.

Rebecca Davis has recently offered a different interpretation of *kynde,* one which my own interpretation – and my claim that, for Langland, the Holy Spirit is the most kynde element within the human being – appreciates, and yet from which I diverge. Davis argues that 'Through its associations with kinship, *kynde* makes it possible to envision creation as an interconnected whole linked together by a universal bond of kinship with God, its origin.'[279] For Davis, Langland's poetry both evokes and violates contemporary scholastic distinctions whereby 'God, the uncreated creator, is *natura naturans,* the active nature who "natures," while creation is *natura naturata,* the passive nature that is "natured" by God.'[280] The upshot for Davis is that Langland's creative, poetic and category-bending deployment of *kynde* creates 'a point of connection between divinity and humanity [whereby] *kynde* is an open conduit for movement in both directions, or, to put this in terms more suited to Langland's dynamic allegory, *kynde* becomes the material ground of communion between the two ontologies of creator and creation.'[281] This expansive and fluid conception of *kynde,* Davis argues, describes a '*via positiva,* an advisedly optimistic account of the natural capacity that persists alongside the poem's darker expressions of doubt and deficiency in the natural realm.'[282] This has implications, Davis argues, for both Langland's exploration concerning the power of language and his own 'makings', and also Langland's vision of human capcity for ethical action in the world. Davis describes Langland's linguistic aims through his deployment of *kynde* thus, 'by depicting God as Kynde, that is under the guise of creation itself, Langland explores

[279] Davis, Rebecca, *Piers Plowman and the Books of Nature* (Oxford University Press: 2016), p. 4.
[280] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[281] *Ibid,* p. 8-9.
[282] *Ibid*, p. 9.

the capacity of nature and of language to bear the plenitude of the divine.'[283] More specifically, Davis argues that 'Kynde becomes a metapoetical figure, a vehicle for exploring how language and figures *do* capture something of the divine.'[284] As such, Davis argues that Langland views his poetry and his poetic interpretation of nature as an ethical act that – gesturing to a Bonaventurean inheritance ascribed to the poem by Lawernce Clopper – fulfills nature's potential by drawing out its spiritual meaning.[285] For Davis, Langland's poetic invention of his own symantic range for *kynde*

> …revalues the terrestrial and the contingent, not by demarcating the observable from the unknowable transcendant, but by bringing God himself to earth. Kynde makes the mundane matter by closing the gap between God and creation that the Natura tradition had opened.'[286]

Thus, Davis argues that through his poetics of *kynde* Langland achieves 'a daring vision of human partnership with God.'[287]

While appreciating much of Davis' remarkably learned and persuasively argued project, the current thesis argues that Langland's representation of sin raises important questions about Davis' optimistic interpretation of *kynde.* Davis herself notes that her interpretation of 'natural capicity' in *Piers Plowman* 'differs sharply from David Aers's interpretation.'[288] While I am fascinated, and in many ways persuaded, by Davis' argument that Langland deploys language in ways that 'evoke and violate' so many scholastic distinctions in order to display language's capacity to 'bear the plenitude of the

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[283] *Ibid,* p. 2.
[284] *Ibid*, p. 17.
[285] *Ibid,* pp. 11, 24.
[286] *Ibid,* p. 31.
[287] *Ibid,* p. 34.
[288] *Ibid,* p. 30.

divine', the current chapter of this thesis not only affirms Aers's interpretation of sin in *Piers Plowman,* but goes further to demonstrate the ways in which Langland's account of sin is even more terrifying than the terms Aers outlines in *Salvation in Sin* and furthermore that Langland's robust theology of sin raises questions about the language and the mediators Langland imagines capable of 'bearing the plenitude of the divine.' As will become clear through the course of this chapter, and more explicitly so in chapter three, the present thesis argues that Langland's poetry recovers a patristic and Augustinian tradition that binds together the church, the Eucharist and Jesus Christ under the mystical terms of what Augustine often refers to as *totus christus.* As a result of Langland's respresentation of sin, his language of *kynde* proves provocative, creative and yet ultimately insufficient to bear the plenitude of the divine in *Piers Plowman.* Perhaps, surprisingly, chapter three will argue that it is Langland's own unique retrieval and development of the patristic tradition of *totus christus* that draws his audience into a daring vision of human partnership with God. It is through Langland's vision of the *church*, rather than *nature*, that invites his audience to envision creation as an interconnected whole linked together by a universal bond of kinship with God, its origin. But first, I return to Langland's pneumatology and his robust account of sin.

The Samaritan's pneumatology described above echoes the previous account offered by Ymaginatif,

Ac grace is a graes ther-fore to don hem efte growe;
Ac grace ne groweth nat til gode-wil gyue reyne
And woky thorw gode werkes wikkede hertes.
Ac ar such a wil wexe worcheth god sulue

And sent forth the seynt espirit to do loue sprynge:

Spiritus ubi vult spirat.

So grace withouten grace of god and also gode werkes

May nat be, be thow syker, thogh we bidde euere.[289]

For both the Samaritan and Ymaginatif, humans entirely lack the capacity to act in accordance with grace without the initiative of the Creator and the aid of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit does not act coercively upon a wholly unwilling human agent, but rather invites persons to participate in a grace that will grow within, as 'a graes', just as the good will created in them by God participates more and more fully in the rhythms spurred on through the Holy Spirit. The Samaritan's teaching will repeat this mode of imagistic representation throughout his teaching on grace. More must be said regarding Langland's representations of the processes of mediated, participatory divine grace, but for the moment I focus on the possibility and consequences of refusing such grace.

The Samaritan describes 'vnkynde creatures' as persons whose vicious desire extends above and beyond love for their fellow human beings to such an extent that 'vnkynde creatures' are willing to kill others in order to acquire material goods. Yet, as the Samaritan's examples make clear, it is not only a willingness to kill, but also a willingness to ignore, that makes a person 'vnkynde.' While an argument could be made that the Samaritan's specific mention of 'the fader' in lines 204-213 intentionally recalls Anselm, most of the poem's commentators rightly agree that the Samaritan primarily

[289] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.24-9, [But grace is a grassy herb that makes them grow again; / But grace won't grow until goodwill gives rain / And through good works moistens wicked hearts. / But before such desire grew God himself went to work / And sent forth the Holy Spirit to make love spring up: / *The spirit breatheth where he will.* / So grace without God's grace and good works as well / Cannot be, you can be sure, though we pray forever].

renders 'vnkyndenesse' as a disorder or failing between human-to-human relations.[290] This is evident in the examples the Samaritan employs. For the Samaritan's more pressing pedagogical aim is to represent grace as the deepest reality which connects human beings to God and to one another through their participation in God the Father through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

One example the Samaritan recalls is that of Diues, a rich man who won rightful wealth and yet was damned. The Samaritan explains, 'Yut wan he nat with wrong ne with queynte slethes, / But rihtfulliche, as men rat, al his richesse cam hym' and yet 'That Diues deyede, dampned for his vnkyndesse.'[291] The Samaritan attributes Diues' vnkyndenesse to his willing ignorance of the needful poor,

> And for he was a nygard and a nythynge to the nedfol pore,
> For godes tretor he is told for al his trewe catel
> And dampned a dwelleth with the deuel in helle.[292]

Through the example of Diues, the Samaritan affirms 'vnkyndesse' as a mode of ignorance, a failure of those, even whose riches are 'rihtfulliche', to care for figures such as Lazarus.

The Samaritan draws from another biblical narrative to describe another extreme of vnkyndesse. Specifically, the figure robbed, bound, mortally wounded and left *semyiuef* (half-dead, half-alive) by the roadside to die in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). Langland describes *Semyiuef* as having suffered at the hands of

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[290] Derek Pearsall *William Langland Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text* ed. Derek Pearsall (University of Exeter Press, 2008), p. 316 n. 185.
[291] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.236-7, 234.
[292] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.242-4, [And because he was a niggard and nothing-giver to the needful poor, / He's reckoned God's traitor despite his honest wealth / And is damned to dwell with the Devil in hell].

…this corsede theues,

Vnkynde cristene men, for coueytise and enuye

Sleth a man for his mebles with mouthe or with handes.[293]

Langland has the Samaritan describe 'vnkyndesse' as a sort of violence, performed by word or deed, either direct or indirect, with the intention to either maliciously acquire or ignorantly maintain wealth over and against the needs of others. Interestingly, the Samaritan identifies 'vnkyndesse' in conjunction with certain ecclesial practices used to sustain 'vnkyndesse', and deems these practices salvifically impotent,

Be vnkynde to thyn emcristene and al that thow canst bidde,

Dele and do penaunce day and nyhte euere

And purchase al the pardoun of Pampilon and of Rome

And indulgences ynowe, and be ingrate to thy kynde,

The holy goest hereth the nat ne helpeth the, be thow certeyne.[294]

These are the same practices Conscience will identify as integral to the growth of holiness within the fortress church 'Vnity' at the poem's end. Yet, these practices are ineffective, so the Samaritan argues, because they fail to recognize the type of offense 'vnkyndesse' entails. 'Vnkyndesse' is a failure to acknowledge one's fellow human beings, as Piers does, as 'blody bretherne' united together into one 'kynde', one body, through God in Christ.[295] Such failure of recognition is the same failure the people of 'Vnity' embody in their rejection of the Eucharist and the rule of Christ, and thus, the

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[293] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XIX.257-9, […like those cursed thieves, / Unkind Christian men, for covetousness and envy / Kill a man for his property by mouth or with hands].

[294] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XIX.220-4, [Be unkind to your fellow Christians and all that you can pray for, / Deal alms and do penance day and night forever / And buy all the pardon out of Pamplona and Rome / And indulgences enough, and be *ingratis* to your kind, / The Holy Ghost won't hear you or help you, you can be sure].

[295] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VIII.216.

Samaritan's teaching provides a resource for Langland's audience to confirm a skeptical reading of the church Conscience will later form under the guidance of Kynde Wit.

For the Samaritan, the opposite of these two modes of 'vnkyndesse' involves living in accordance with 'kynde', a recognition of mutual dependence and responsibility, and in the event of certain 'vnkynde' acts, participation in acts of amendment performed in order to return to the pattern and shared life of 'kynde' through restitution. The Samaritan maintains that an act, or at least a will, towards restitution is fundamentally necessary to counter the effects of 'vnkyndesse' which extinguish the yet latent flame of grace,

> Thus, is vnkyndesse the contrarie that quencheth, as hit were,
> The grace of the holy goest, godes owene kynde;
> For that kynde doth, vnkynde fordoth,…[296]

Such undoing occurs by degree, of which the most extreme is a willingness to 'sleth' another human being 'with mouthe or with handes' for the sake of covetousness, as do the thieves who rob *Semyiuef*. The Samaritan's account of this extreme form of 'vnkyndesse' is worth citing in full because of the unique way that it displays the Samaritan's understanding of the severity of both sin and grace,

> Vnkynde cristene men, for coueytise and enuye
> Sleth a man for his mebles with mouthe or with handes.
> For that the holy goest hath to kepe tho harlotes distruyeth,
> The which is lyf and loue, the leye of mannes body.
> For euery manere goed man may be likned to a torche

[296] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.255-7, [Thus unkindness is the contrary that quenches, as it were, / The grace of the Holy Ghost, God's own kindness; / For what kindness does, unkindness undoes…].

Or elles to a taper to reuerense with the trinite

And ho-so morthereth a goed man, me thynketh bi myn inwit,

A fordoth the lihte that oure lord loketh to haue worschipe of.

And yut in mo maneres men offenden the holy gost;

Ac this is the worste wyse that eny with myhte

Synegen ayen the seynte spirit – assente to destruye,

For coueytise of eny kyne thynge, that Crist dere bouhte.

How myhte he aske mercy or eny mercy hym defende

That wikkedliche and wilfulliche wolde mercy anyente?

Innocence is next god and nyht and day hit crieth

'Veniaunce! veniaunce! foryeue be hit neuere

That shent vs and shedde oure bloed, forshupte vs as hit semede:

Vindica sanguinem iustorum!'

Thus 'veniaunce! veniaunce!' verray charite asketh;

And sethe charite, that holy churche is, chargeth this so sore

Leue Y neuere that oure lord at the last ende

Wol louye that lyf that loue and charite destruyeth.'[297]

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[297] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.257-77, [Unkind Christian men, for covetousness and envy / Kill a man for his property by mouth or with hands. / For what the Holy Ghost has in keep these evil men destroy, / Which is life and love, the flame of man's body. / For every manner of good man may be compared to a torch / Or else to a taper with which to revere the Trinity. / And whoever murders a good man, it seems to me in my conscience, / He puts out the light that our Lord looks to have worship of. / And in still more ways men offend the Holy Ghost; / But this is the worst way that any man might / Sin against the Holy Spirit – assent to destroy, / Out of covetousness for any kind of thing, what Christ dearly bought. / How might he ask mercy or any mercy defend him / Who wickedly and willfully would annihilate mercy? / Innocence is next to God and night and day cries / 'Vengeance! Vengeance! let it never be forgiven / Of those who defiled us and shed our blood, as it seemed unraveled us: *Avenge the blood of the just!'* / Thus 'vengeance! vengeance!' true charity askes: / And since Charity, who is Holy Church, commands this so strongly, / I'll never believe that our Lord at the last end / Will love that life that destroys love and charity'].

To this, Will asks the Samaritan whether it is possible for him to be saved if he has sinned in the way described above, specifically that life that destroys life and charity by either word or deed. The Samaritan, perhaps surprisingly, says 'Yus…so thow myhtest repente / That rihtwisnesse thorw repentaunce to reuthe myhte turne.'[298] The Samaritan's use of the word 'turne' is not surprising given its Greek and New Testament roots (μετὰνοια); but carries a particular weight of meaning within the wider semantic register of the poem given the work's attention to the turning of Conscience considered in the previous chapter. It is also the case that Langland makes much use of the term 'turne' as a referent not only in regards to repentance, but also its opposite, a sort of hardening into sin which turns persons made in the *imago dei* into 'vnkynde' creatures. The Samaritan describes such turning as a sort of rejection of an eternally extended divine mercy,

> Thus hit fareth bi such folk that folewen here owene will,
> That euele lyuen and leten nat till if hem forsake;
> Drede of diseracion thenne dryueth awey grace
> That mercy in here mynde may nat thenne falle.
> For goed hope, that helpe thenne scholde, to wanhope ther turneth
> And nat of the nownpower of god, that he ne is ful of myhte
> To amende al that amys is, and his mercy grettore
> Thenne al oure wikkede werkes, as holy writ telleth:
> *Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius*.[299]

[298] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.283-4.
[299] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.291-7, [So it goes for such people who follow their own will, / Who live to do evil and don't let up till life forsakes them; / The dread that comes out of despair then drives grace away / So that mercy may not then fall into their minds. / For good hope, that should help then, turns there into utter despair, / And not that God hasn't the power or that he's not full of might / To amend all that's amiss, and his mercy greater / Than all our wicked works, as holy writ tells: / His mercies are over all his works].

It is the process of turning, a formation into and addiction to sin, that cements 'vnkyndesse' into the mind of persons who cannot but reject an ever-extended divine mercy. True, the Samaritan's 'Yus' is never abandoned, but it is only uttered within a context that takes seriously the anthropological conviction that human beings are creatures formed through communities and habituating practices. God's mercy is never withheld, so the Samaritan affirms, but the reception of such mercy requires a turning, a reformation from the habits and communities of sin, habits and communities that Langland represents as capable of turning a human being to 'vnkyndesse',

> Ac ar his rihtwisnesse to reuthe turne, restitucion hit maketh,
> As sorwe of herte is satisfaccioun for suche that may nat paye.[300]

The Samaritan's account of grace is utterly participatory, and specifically participatory in regards to the necessity of persons and communities participating in habits of restitution and reconciliation befitting a corporate and Eucharistic life, a conviction pictured so well through the Samaritan's commitment that *Semyiuef* cannot survive without his full participation in the body and blood of the child. In order to consider more fully the resources Langland offers for an opening up of the imaginative space for what Eucharistic lives might look like, I now move to consider three of the poem's representations of figures turned by sin.

§

Langland's pedagogical order first demonstrates how sin operates and effects communities, and only later, retrospectively and dialectically, demonstrates the impact of

[300] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.298-9, [But before his righteousness turns to pity, restoration has to be made, / And sorrow of heart is satisfaction for such who can't pay].

sin both corporately and individually upon the *imago dei* in the human person and human societies.[301] This ordering sets up a sort of dialectical and retrospective spiral in which the full effects of sin only begin to become clear once figures in the poem, and so the audience, have already suffered sins' effects and are then empowered to reflect upon sin through the poem's representations of Christ.[302] Aers has made much of Langland's account of sin as a dialectical and retrospective process. He does this by showing how *Piers Plowman* portrays sin as thoroughly social and yet discernable only Christologically by reading the Samaritan scene of the C-text as a corrective to the poem's previous figurations of sin and its effects by the friars in Passus X.[303] Consideration of the ways in which the poem represents sin to operate specifically through the social, economic and soul-shattering processes constitutive of the poem's representation of Couetyse in Passus VI of the C-text will develop this further.[304]

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[301] Aers describes the way *Piers Plowman* works when he explains that Langland's interests 'are unfolded in a complex work whose processes are thoroughly dialectical. So our reading must recognize how the poem's own processes are intrinsic to the poem's theology. Many positions receive powerful advocacy but are later, often much later, subjected to further interrogation and superseded. Supersession is not, however, the same as forgetting' (David Aers *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), p. 84).

[302] Aers argues persuasively that for Langland, as for Karl Barth and Augustine, the bondage of the human will to sin can only be understood Christologically (Aers *Salvation and Sin*, pp. 83-131). Aers' helpfully engages and corrects many missteps in contemporary Langland studies that have unduly ascribed to Langland a 'Pelagian' or 'semi-Pelagian' account of God's grace and human action. Aers argues convincingly against this strand of interpretation by demonstrating the way in which the interaction between Will, the Samaritan and *Semyuief* in Passus XIX corrects erroneous accounts of sin presented earlier in the poem. Key to Aers' argument is that both Langland's Christology and his understanding of sin are profoundly social (Aers *Salvation and Sin*, pp. 111-2).

[303] Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, pp. 83-131. Aers argues that Langland's representation of the effects of sin through *Semyuief* in Passus XIX, as one utterly bound and on the brink of death, subverts the image of sin described by the friars in Passus X. For the friars, sin only affects a person as one falling within the safe confines of a boat. Summarizing the friars' image of sin Aers writes, 'The fallings are, however, without harm or consequence, for he [the sinner] just keeps falling into the boat' (p. 102). The significance of this view of sin is a sharp contrast to the picture of *Semyuief* bound and dying. Aers goes on to demonstrate the way the figure of *Semyuief* in Passus XIX offers a corrective to the friars' view of sin. This latter image regards sin as utterly devastating to the human capacity for good apart from grace, and demonstrates, so Aers argues, the nuanced and thoroughly Augustinian account of grace that emerges from *Piers Plowman* over and against some contemporary scholars who read the poem as 'Semi-Pelagian.'

[304] As noted in Chapter 1 the effects of sin are evident in the very opening scene of the Prologue, a scene Will beholds, and a scene that Conscience critiques. The representation of sin in the Prologue, while both

First, this analysis will demonstrate ways in which Couetyse is presented as a development of sin's effects upon Gloutton, and a foreshadowing of sin's haunting effects upon the figure of the Brewer and the community that forms around the Brewer in the final passus. Second, this section will place Langland's visions of sin in the context of three strands of theological discourse Langland's poetry draws upon and develops. Third and finally, the section concludes by considering two later moments the poem offers as examples of Will's identity becoming completely 'turned.' In so doing, this analysis demonstrates the ways in which the poem's portrayal of Conscience's turning as described in the previous chapter anticipate and inform the poem's representation of other key figures' transformations. Gloutton, Couetyse, the Brewer, and Will provide examples of the processes and possibilities involved in one's formation in sin, as well as the effects such formation can have upon persons and communities. Langland depicts sin as not only more destructive than the position put forth by late-medieval orthodoxy, but also leaves the door open to envision sin as even more destructive than it is depicted through the figure of *Semyuief* and the teaching of the Samaritan in Passus XIX.[305] Consequently, the impetus of this chapter's argument is that a full presentation of the poem's robust, terrifying and even unorthodox representation of the possibilities of sin is necessary in order to appreciate the way Langland invites his audience to consider the ways both sin, and later its cure, depend upon a thoroughly social, ecclesial and sacramental

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social and economic, is a representation of a situation, and not the processes bound up in forming of society. Langland's detailed study of sin in Passus VI-VII (of the C-text, Passus V of the B-text) more fully illuminates the social and economic processes of the kinds of sin Will beholds in his initial visions of society. While Langland's detailed study of the sins' confessions clarifies key elements of the making of society into a fractured and degrading economy of relations, even this detailed study of the sins' confessions fails to illuminate the full extent of sin's economy; a revelation only possibly in the light of Christ, Charity and the Samaritan in Passus XIX (C-text, XVII B-text).

[305] See Nicolette Zeeman *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Christology. That salvation is rendered in such a social, ecclesial and sacramental order makes the question of discerning and negotiating rival claims to ecclesial authority all the more pressing.

§ Couetyse, Glotoun and the Brewer

Langland's depiction of Couetyse and Glotoun appear side by side in Passus VI. The passus itself offers a range of encounters between Repentance and six of the seven deadly sins. Reading Glotoun and Couetyse together highlights their differences, and furthermore, the specific language Langland uses for each reappears in his representation of *Semyuief* and the Brewer later in the poem. These linguistic links, it can be argued, illuminate key elements of the poem's theology of sin and its effects.

The material economy of Couetyse described in Passus VI illumines the frighteningly destructive powers that sin has upon the *imago dei* in humankind. Couetyse portrays sin as that which is formed in a person through processes of habituation so as to invert a person's nature, making one 'an vnkynde creature.'[306] To achieve this (mal)formation Couetyse literally becomes a 'prentis', or apprentice, to 'Symme at the style' in the craft of false trading and usury.[307] Figuring Couetyse as a learned craft, or trade, is a repeated trope in various contemporary vernacular works.[308] What is unique about Langland's portrayal of Couetyse is the way he describes Couetyse's formation into and perpetuation of sin as requiring participation in an interconnected web of

[306] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.294, [an unnatural creature].
[307] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.208.
[308] See especially, *Speculum Vitae: A Reading Edition* ed. Ralph Hanna 2 vols. Early English Text Society no. 331 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), lines 6143-6150: 'Auaryce may be tolde bi skille / Bigynnynge and rote of alle ille; / that es a craft that the fende leres / To them that wil be his skolers. / Auaryce men may bi skille calle / A tre that growes and spredes ouer alle, / Of whilk springes braunches ten / that spredes amange all maner of men. / Ane es Oker [usury] first to bygynne; ...'.

relationships.[309] Not only does Couetyse train under Symme, he goes on to describe the way his formation gives him the capacity for innovative, corruptive and re-productive sin beyond that which he learns from his teacher. Couetyse explains how he left Symme to join cloth-makers whom he taught ingenious methods for deceitful trading.[310] Advancing beyond this particular professional guild, Couetyse then slithers into the domestic sphere, marries, and he and his wife collude together in spinning out deceitfully thin wool and watered-down ale: all for their profit at the expense of others.[311] Couetyse even perpetuates the life cycle of sin by training his own apprentice whom he sends to collect his loan profits from far off lands.[312] The processes of Couetyse are thoroughly social. This form of sin operates like a sort of virus that multiplies, regenerates and grows stronger, more vicious, as it degrades the health of its host.[313] Throughout Couetyse's life, he depends upon and participates in communities for the formation, practice and perpetuation of his existence. His influence extends into both professional guilds as well

[309] Couetyse is here the very antithesis of Rebecca Davis' more optimistic view of Langland's representation of *kynde* 'as both a product and a craft, a process of *ongoing* cultivation that requires the participation of all those who by definition claim a share in its meaning' (18). Couetyse exemplifies how Davis is absolutely right about Langland's representation of the participatory, ongoing link between the human and the divine by way of a poetic imagination that binds the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine together. And yet, Couetyse also demonstrates the way in which Langland's unrelenting exploration of the destructive capacity of sin reveals deep reservations with any attempt to imagine salvation as 'natural' apart from God's grace. That is to say, for Langland, humanity and God are deeply linked, and yet sin reveals, that this link is the link of grace rather than nature. Humanity's healing, for Langland, is always brought about by participation in the prior, sustaining and ultimate act of God's grace.
[310] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.215-20.
[311] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.206-33.
[312] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.279-85.
[313] Another popular medieval image depicting a usurer is that of a spider. Jacques Le Goff offers an excellent example, 'This is how Jacques de Vitry describes the funeral of a usurer spider: I heard tell of a knight, that he met a group of monks who were on their way to bury the corpse of a usurer. He said to them, 'I will let you have the corpse of my spider and let the Devil have his soul. But *I* will have the spider's web, that is to say, all its money.' It is quite right to compare usurers to spiders, who eviscerate themselves in order to trap flies, and who sacrifice to the devil not only themselves but also their sons, dragging them into the fire of greed...this process is perpetuated with their heirs. In fact, some of them, even before the birth of their sons, assign them money so they will multiply by usury and thus their sons are born hairy like Esau and extremely rich. On their death they leave their money to their sons, who then begin to wage a new war on God.'' in Jacques Le Goff *Money and the Middle Ages: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 66.

as his family. Couetyse grasps the social and habituated nature of sin in all its terrifying fullness.

Langland's figuration of sin through Couetyse portrays a frightening habituation not only because of the infectious mode of Couetyse's cultivation, but also because of sin's effects on Couetyse himself. Couetyse literally inverts human nature, and this is depicted vividly through the exchange between Couetyse and Repentence.

Following Couetyse's recollections of his formation in sin, Repentance asks, 'Repentedestow neuere?... ne / restitucioun madest?'[314] Couetyse's response demonstrates not simply that he lacks an understanding of the term 'restitucioun', but instead that he has become so malformed as to give the term a different meaning all together. Couetyse takes 'restitucioun' as the French 'riflynge' and goes on to describe that he has indeed performed this act, once rifling through and stealing from the bags of sleeping tradesmen at an inn.[315] Couetyse's association with the signifier 'restitucioun' is a mirror image, a complete inversion, of the sin Repentance intends to name.[316] Perhaps believing this to be a genuine misunderstanding, Repentance asks Couetyse another question, 'Vsedestow euere vsurye in al thy lyf-tyme?'[317] To this, Couetyse claims he is innocent. In a different sort of linguistic fumble, Couetyse associates 'vsurye' with lechery and denies his guilt 'saue in my youthe.'[318] At this, the reader is tempted to imagine Couetyse giving Repentance a smirk, perhaps a wink. Because Couetyse then

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[314] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.233-4, ['And you never repented?... or made / restitution?'].
[315] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.235-7.
[316] See Mary Carruthers *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in* Piers Plowman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 3-5. Carruther's discusses the processes involved in the inversion of meaning in *Piers Plowman* in terms of pleonasm (pp. 41-3). Another recent study of this inversion of meaning can be found in David Aers 'Langland on the Church and the End of the Cardinal Virtues' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 4 (2012): 67-9. Here, Aers explores these inversions of meaning as *paradiastole*.
[317] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.239: ['During your lifetime did you ever practice usury?'].
[318] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.240: ['except in my youth.'].

goes on, with dark irony, to describe in detail a lifetime of usurious practices that he learned and perfected while training under various Lombard bankers.[319] Couetyse makes no connection between 'vsurye' and his life of usury. Now alarmed, Repentance warns Couetyse that not even the pope and all his confessors have the power to absolve him of his sin unless Couetyse makes restitution, the same counsel we might expect the Samaritan to give this figure.[320] Repentance's warning is, of course, ineffectual because Couetyse has given new meaning to restitution.

The tensions haunting this exchange between Repentence and Couetyse are not isolated to Langland's imagination. Indeed, they are manifest in the daily tensions of life in the late middle ages. Le Goff explains,

> For most of the thirteenth century, the only way in which the usurer could avoid going to Hell was to restore what he had gained through taking interest, that is, usury. The best restitution was that performed by the usurer before his death, but he could also save himself after death by including the restitution in his will.[321]

Thomas Aquinas further underscores the intimate relationship between restitution and salvation,

> Restitution as stated above (A. 1) is an act of commutative justice, and this demands a certain equality. Wherefore restitution denotes the return of the thing unjustly taken; since it is by giving it back that equality is re-established. If, however, it be taken away justly, there will be equality, and so there will be no need for restitution, for justice consists in equality. Since therefore the safegaurding of justice is necessary for

[319] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.241-7.
[320] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.253-7.
[321] Le Goff, *Money and the Middle Ages*, p. 64.

> salvation, it follows that it is necessary for salvation to restore what has been taken unjustly.[322]

A similar idea of restitution extends beyond the university and into ecclesial law, as is explicitly evident in the thirty-ninth constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council,

> It often happens, when a person has been unjustly robbed and the object has been transferred by the robber to a third party, that he is not helped by an action of restitution against the new possessor because he has lost the advantage of possession, and he loses in effect the right ownership on account of the difficulty of proving his case. We therefore decree, notwithstanding the force of civil law, that is anyone henceforth knowingly receives such a thing, then the one robbed shall be favoured by his being awarded restitution against the one in possession. For the latter as it were succeeds the robber in his vice, inasmuch as there is not much difference, especially as regards danger to the soul, between unjustly hanging on to another's property and seizing it.[323]

Following Repentance's warning, Couetyse exhibits the extent of his formation beyond linguistic examples, and shows the way his formation in sin has not only inverted his language, but also his nature. Ignoring, or failing to understand Repentance's warning, Couetyse explains his obsession over his profits, an obsession that is riddled

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[322] The critical edition for the *Summae theolgiae* used here is the Leonine edition, *Corpus Thomisticum, Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Summa Theologiae*, Leonine edition (Rome, 1888), https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth0000.html
which is cited following the usual conventions for Aquinas's works, with the abbreviation ST, here, Aquinas ST IIa-IIae q.62.2.co, [Respondeo dicendum quod restitutio, sicut dictum est, est actus iustitiae commutativae, quae in quadam aequalitate consistit. Et ideo restituere importat redditionem illius rei quae iniuste ablata est, sic enim per iteratam eius exhibitionem aequalitas reparatur. Si vero iuste ablatum sit, inaequalitas erit ut ei restituatur, quia iustitia in aequalitate consistit. Cum igitur servare iustitiam sit de necessitate salutis, consequens est quod restituere id quod iniuste ablatum est alicui, sit de necessitate salutis], trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province in *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948), p. 1450.

[323] Norman Tanner *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Georgetown University Press, 1990) vol. 1 of 2, p. 252.

with anxiety, and an anxiety that is unrelieved by the church's witness and the ecclesial practices which should stand to remind him of his true treasure, the grace of God and His great might,

> Myhte neuere me comforte in the mene tyme
> Nother matynes ne masse ne no maner sythes;
> Ne neuere penaunce parformede ne *pater-noster* sayde
> That my muynde ne was more on my godes in a doute
> Then in the grace of god and in his grete myhte;[324]

At this, Repentance issues an unsettling judgment, 'Thou art an vnkynde creature; / Y can the nat assoile / Til thow haue ymad by thy myhte to alle men restitucioun.'[325] In the C-text, this judgment is immediately followed by two figurations of Couetyse who have not totally lost their capacity to understand Repentance's sense of 'restitucioun', and Repentance affirms, in accordance with Aquinas and the Fourth Lateran Council, that there is indeed still hope for those who have won wrongful gain, confess and are yet unable to fulfill the material demands of making restitution to all whom they have wronged.[326]

A demonstration of the range of Langland's thinking about the effects of sin comes through comparing the figures of Glotoun and Couetyse. Immediately following Langland's depiction of Couetyse, and Repentance's haunting declaration that Couetyse is 'unkynde' and unforgiveable, we meet Glotoun walking to church for confession.[327]

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[324] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.282-5, ['Nothing might comfort me in the meantime, / Neither matins nor mass nor any other sight; / Nor performed penance ever or said *pater noster* / That my mind was not more on my goods in my anxiety / Than on the grace of God and his great might'].
[325] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.294-5, ['You're an unnatural creature; I can't absolve you / Till you've made to the best of your ability restitution to all men'].
[326] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.309-49.
[327] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.350ff.

Yet, passing Betty the Brewer's brew house, Glotoun proves incapable of resisting the temptation of good ale, hot spices and the fellowship of the tavern. Glotoun is soon swept up into tavern games and a drunkenness that keeps him from church and confession. Langland's poetry portrays Glotoun's drunkenness as a slow drifting, drink by drink, as the church and the means of grace Glotoun so desperately needs reappear and fade, reappear and fade until his eyes grow dark and he passes out. Glotoun's friends greet him 'with a galoun of ale' and with much laughing they all shout 'lat go the coppe!' [please pass the cup!], in an almost certain Eucharistic pun.[328] Overfull of food and drink, Langland graphically portrays Glotoun's stomach grumbling and then 'A pissede a potel in a *pater-noster* whyle.'[329] Here are hints of prayer and the Eucharist, hints of grace that then fade away. Langland's depiction of sin's effects upon Glotoun are specifically blinding and incapacitating, 'He [Glotoun] myhte nother steppe ne stande til he a staf hadde, / ... And when he drow to the dore thenne dymmede hi yes; / A thromblede at the thresfold and threw to the erthe.'[330] This blinding and incapacitating effect of sin appears in a different form in Passus XIX. In Passus XIX, the reader finds *Semyuief*, a figure whose incapacitation is far more dire than Glotoun's. *Semyuief*'s incapacitation is described in terms of bondage and a mortal wounding with language that explicitly recalls the prior description of Glotoun. *Semyuief* is so bound that, 'For he ne myhte stepe ne stande ne stere foet ne handes / Ne helpe hymsulue sothly for *semyuief* he semede / And as naked as an nedle and noen helpe abouten.'[331] With Glotoun, the

[328] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.393-4.
[329] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.398-9, [He pissed half a gallon in the time of a *pater noster*].
[330] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VI.403, 406-7, ['He could neither step nor stand unless he held a staff, / ... And when he reached the door, then his eyes dimmed, / And he stumbled on the threshold and fell to the ground'].
[331] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.56-8, ['For he could neither step nor stand nor stir a foot or hands / Nor help himself in any way, for he seemed *semyuief*, / And as naked as a needle and no help about'].

immediate consequences of sin is drunkenness and a hangover, a condition he can still manage with a staff and time to sleep it off.

With the figure of *Semyuief*, on the other hand, sins' effects are life threatening beyond *Semyuief*'s ability to save himself. *Semyuief*'s apparently mortal condition is punctuated when the Samaritan quickly discovers that *Semyuief* 'was in perel to deye.'[332] Unlike Glotoun, *Semyuief* cannot stumble to his room and sleep off the effects of his sin. *Semyuief* portrays sin as fatal and requiring immediate aide. Only through the help and medicine of the Samaritan, the care of the innkeeper at the grange and *Semyuief*'s full participation in the body and blood of the child does the Samaritan hold out hope for the survival and recovery of this half-dead, half-living man.[333] These two scenes, of Glotoun and *Semyuief*, work together to present, correct and demonstrate the devastating and life-threatening effects of sin. The question might be posed what this means for Couetyse, a sin shown not only to bind, blind and incapacitate, but to actually invert human nature so as to make a person 'an vnkynde creature', apparently un-absolvable – utterly separated from God. Through the figure of Couetyse, Langland leaves open the possibility of a sin, made possible through a community, that is so deforming to human beings that it not only fractures, but completely destroys the *imago dei* in a person.

That there is a sort of analogous relationship between *Semyuief*'s figuration of salvation and sin linguistically recalling the figure of Glotoun, and the demonstration of sin in the much more frightening way through the figure of Couetyse and later, the Brewer of Passus XXI, can be put forward. The powerful effects of Langland's poetry in relation to the question at hand are worth considering again here. The folk reject

[332] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.67, ['was in danger of dying.'].
[333] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.64-105.

Conscience's offer of the Eucharist and his invitation that they make restitution, forgive each other and reconcile as they come to altar,

'How?' quod alle the comune, 'thow conseylest vs to yelde
Al that we owen eny wyhte or that we go to hosele?'[334]

The Brewer, who is so consumed and formed by the maze of the world and his own practices of covetousness wholly rejects the Eucharist as well as the Lord who offers it. The Brewer shouts back at the giver,

'Ye? Bawe!' quod a breware, 'Y wol nat be yruled,
By Iesu! For al youre iangelyng, after *Spiritus iusticie*
Ne aftur Consience, bu Crist, while Y can sulle
Bothe dregges and draf and drawe at on hole
Thikke ale and thynne ale; and that is my kynde
And nat to hacky aftur holinesse – hold thy tonge, Consience!
Of *Spiritus iusticie* thow spekest moche an ydel.'[335]

In this figure of the Brewer, Langland offers perhaps the most haunting image in the poem, the embodiment of the sin of covetousness whereby a person's desire, indeed their nature, is so twisted by sin and the lust for more that a person determines to alienate themselves from the body of Christ. In this way, the Brewer figures the embodiment, and thereby the possibility, of a person and a society so formed through Couetyse and greed for profit as to become 'vnkynde.' Specifically, the Brewer ridicules Conscience and

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[334] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.391-2, ['Come again?' said the common people, 'you counsel us to give back / All that we owe anybody before coming to communion?'].
[335] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.396-403, ['Oh, yeah?' said a brewer, 'I won't be ruled / By Jesus! Despite all your fast-talk, according to *Spiritus iusticie* / Nor according to Conscience, by Christ, as long as I can sell / Both dregs and swill and draw at one hole / Thick ale or thin ale; that's the kind of guy I am / And not to poke around for holiness – so just shut up Conscience! / Your *Spiritus iusticie* speech is a lot of hot air!'].

confesses that he is of a different 'kynde' and cannot recognize *Spiritus iusticie* but only covetous gain, 'while Y can sulle / Bothe dregges and draf and drawe at on hole / Thikke ale and thynne ale; and that is my kynde.' The Brewer, like Couetyse, has developed a different nature, a different 'kynde' and is now incapable of recognizing the virtue of a life lived out through the bonds of a mutual self-giving community between God and others. Analogous to the resonance between Glotoun and *Semyiuef*, Langland's use of the Brewer in this scene recalls Couetyse's infiltration into the domestic sphere of brewmaking in Passus VI. The figures are not only linked linguistically and thematically but even through a common trade.

Furthermore, this later figuration of the Brewer recalls Couetyse of Passus VI insofar as this later Brewer is a person who refuses to make restitution with both his fellow human beings and also with God by rejecting the Eucharist, and thus becoming unforgivable.[336] That Langland portrays this unsettling possibility through the figure of a Brewer, and not a banker, merchant, or noble, underlies the poem's anxiety that the corruptive forces of covetousness upon society and individual desire are capable of penetrating all levels of society, not just a privileged minority. And furthermore, by re-casting Couetyse in the figure of a Brewer, a person who is legally and morally responsible for a community as *paterfamilas* under London Ordinance, Langland punctuates the social implications of sin's destructive economy.[337] Indeed, the Brewer's rejection of the Eucharist initiates a communal mimicry whereby the people follow the Brewer's act of rejection. The Brewer in this scene not only depicts his own rejection of

[336] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.396-408.
[337] Barbara Hanawalt 'The Host, the Law, and the Ambiguous Space of Medieval London Taverns' in her *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 104-23.

God in the Eucharist, but also the way in which a whole community becomes so formed through the desire for more as to conspire together in its rejection of God and God's gift. Thus, the question the Brewer raises goes beyond the more abstract wonder of whether sin can so unravel a human soul so as to make a person less than human. The Brewer asks whether or not specific practices born out of covetousness and which perpetuate the sin of covetousness might not only transform a person but also a community in such a way that a person and a community might become antithetical to God, to grace and to the practices of the church.

§

Langland's anxiety over covetousness, usury and restitution have immediate roots in ecclesiastical debates concerning money and its use in the medieval period. Take, for instance, the way the twenty-fifth canon of the Third Lateran Council of 1179 anticipates some of Langland's anxiety about covetousness, the practices of usury and the effects of the cultivation of the desire for more within society,

> Nearly everywhere the crime of usury has become so firmly rooted that many, omitting other business, practice usury as if it were permitted, and in no way observe how it is forbidden in both Old and New Testament. We therefore declare that notorious usurers should not be admitted to communion of the alter or receive christian burial if they die in this sin. Whoever receives them or gives them christian burial should be compelled to give back (*reddere*) what he has received, and let him

> remain suspended from the performance of his office until he has made satisfaction according to the judgment of his own bishop.[338]

Until the thirteenth century, monastic institutions served as the main money-lenders in Latin Christendom.[339] This fiscal activity was, however, governed by the church's conviction, as expressed in the canon above, that lending at interest between Christians directly contradicted the command of the Scriptures.[340] The church in turn forbade the practice of lending at interest, while Christians simultaneously depended on this practice as performed, not without derision, by Jews.[341] In this way, Langland's investigation of sin through Couetyse is hardly arbitrary. Rather, its investigation of the utterly devastating possibilities of sin through the figure of Couetyse is the product of a period in which money begins to function in a radically new way in society.[342]

§ Augustine

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[338] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Tanner:, vol. 1 p. 223.
[339] Le Goff *Money and the Middle Ages,* pp. 61-2.
[340] *Ibid.*, p. 62.
[341] For an excellent recent account of the history of the Jews in the middle ages see Robin R. Mundill *The King's Jews: Money, Massacre and Exodus in Medieval England* (London: Continuum, 2010). Thomas Aquinas provides a more nuanced account of usury, as well as the possibility of licit usury, in *ST* II.II.78. However, the number of medieval treatises on money, usury, just price, and covetousness are both abundant and diverse, and part of the growing literature on pastoral care, pre and post Lateran IV, for example Robert of Flamborough, *Liber poenitentialis*, ed. J. J. Francis Firth (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1971) and Robert Grosseteste, *Templum Dei*, ed. Joseph Goering and F.A.C. Mantello (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984); M. E. Bloomfield et al, *Incipits of Latin Works on the Virtues and Vices 1100-1500 A.D.* (Cambridge. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979). Also Julie L. Mell, *The Myth of the Jewish Money-Lender*, 2 vols (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[342] A full explication of the context and debates around usury and covetousness in the middle ages is beyond the scope of this essay. See especially Alexander Murray *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, England 1978); Michel Mollat *The Poor in the Middle Ages: an essay in social history* trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1986); Christopher Dyer *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in England in the Latter Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Giles E.M. Gasper and Svein H. Gullbekk, eds., *Money and the Church in Medieval Europe, 1000-1200: Practice, Morality and Thought* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

As well as contemporary socio-economic mores, Langland's account of the range of sin's possible effects should also be considered within the theological traditions he received. Augustine's writing on the topic of sin is far more nuanced than many of his alleged medieval, and modern, disciples suggest. Augustine understands sin in at least two overlapping ways: one, in terms of original sin as inherited from Adam and Eve, and another, as a chain of learned habit, a sort of socially instilled custom, that so corrupts human desire that sin becomes itself a necessity. A few examples will help to make Augustine's complex account of sin more clear, and from these examples the relation between Langland and Augustine becomes evident especially in the latter's *Confessions*.

Augustine is aware of sin from the very opening pages of the work, recalling the presence of sin in his own life from the outset, 'I ask you, my God, I ask, Lord, where and when your servant was innocent?'[343] Sin, so Augustine reflects, is present in him even as an infant.[344] Elsewhere in Augustine's corpus, he reflects on the origin of original sin and determines that it is the result of Adam's misuse of his free will.[345] The

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[343] Augustine *Confessionum libri XIII*, ed. Martin Skutella and Luc Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), lib. 1, cap. 7, linea 42, [quod si et in iniquitate conceptus sum et in peccatis mater mea me in utero aluit, ubi, oro te, deus meus, ubi, domine, ego, seruus tuus, ubi aut quando innocens fui?], trans. by Henry Chadwick *Saint Augustine Confessions* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 10.

[344] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 7, linea 3, 'quis me commemorat peccatum infantiae meae, quoniam nemo mundus a peccato coram te, nec infans, cuius est unius diei uita super terram ['Who reminds me of the sin of my infancy? for 'none is pure from sin before you, not even an infant of one day upon the earth' (Job 14:4-5 LXX).']?', trans. Chadwick *Confessions*, p. 9.

[345] Augustine *De natura et gratia*, ed. C. F.Urba and J. Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latina, 60 (Vienna: F. Tempsky,1913), cap. 3, par. 3, linea 8, 'natura quippe hominis primitus inculpata et sine ullo uitio creata est; natura uero ista hominis, qua unusquisque ex adam nascitur, iam medico indiget, quia sana non est. omnia quidem bona, quae habet in formatione, uita, sensibus, mente, a summo deo habet creatore et artifice suo. uitium uero, quod ista naturalia bona contenebrat et infirmat, ut inluminatione et curatione opus habeat, non ab inculpabili artifice contractum est, sed ex originali peccato, quod commissum est libero arbitrio.', [Human nature was in the beginning created blameless and without any defect. But that human nature, in which each of us is born in Adam, now needs a physician, because it is not in good health. All the goods which it has it has in its constitution: life, the senses, and the mind, it has from the sovereign God, its creator and maker. But the defect which darkens and weakens those natural goods so that there is need for enlightenment and healing did not come from its blameless maker. It came from the original sin

consequence of Adam's error is in turn inherited by, and passed on to, the entirety of the human race.[346] The effect of this inherited sin upon Adam's descendants is, so Augustine maintains, itself the punishment for Adam's original sin.[347] That is to say, the degradation that sin brings on begets further degradation, and this devastating process is itself a punishment for sin.

This notion of sin as a punishment leads directly to the second way Augustine understands sin. This second lens sees sin as a chain of learned habit, or socially instilled custom, that so corrupts human desire that sin becomes itself a necessity. Looking beyond his infancy, Augustine recalls, not only his inheritance of sin, but also his initiation into and formation within a culture through which sin begets further sin.[348] Reflecting on his early experiences at school Augustine writes,

> I was disobedient not because I had chosen higher things, but from love of sport. In competitive games I loved the pride of winning. I liked to tickle my ears with false stories which further titillated my desires (2 Tim. 4: 3-4). The same curiosity mountingly increased my appetite for public shows. Public shows are the games of adults. Those who give them are persons held in such high dignity that almost everyone wishes to be their children. But they happily allow them to be flogged if

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which was committed by free choice.], trans. Roland J. Teske, SJ in *Answer to the Pelagians I* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), p. 226.

[346] See William E. Mann 'Augustine on Evil and Original Sin' in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 40-8. While I think Mann is correct to say that sin, for Augustine, is 'inherited, infecting every descendant of Adam and Eve' (47), Mann is wrong to assert that sin, for Augustine, is 'not acquired ... transmitted by propagation, not imitation' (47). In what follows, I will make it quite clear sin, for Augustine, is both inherited and also in some way acquired.

[347] Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, cap. 22, par. 24, linea 21, 'utique ista obscuratio uindicta et poena iam fuit; et tamen per hanc poenam, id est per cordis caecitatem, quae fit deserente luce sapientiae, in plura et grauia peccata conlapsi sunt; dicentes enim esse se sapientes stulti facti sunt.'

[348] See Robert McMahon *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

> such shows hinder the study which will bring them, they hope, to the position of giving such shows![349]

Augustine here recalls his initiation into 'the stormy society of human life' at Rome that teaches him to weep over the death of Dido, and yet makes him totally incapable of weeping over his sins.[350] A culture that teaches him to long for more and more stories that ultimately corrupt his soul.[351] A culture that inflames Augustine's curiosity and lust for the public shows, while ignoring desire and love of God. The result of this 'flood of human custom' is the formation of a heavy and lacerating chain of habit that is itself a punishment through which Augustine unravels and tears himself into pieces, as he pursues an array of sinful pleasures hopelessly incapable of bringing him happiness.[352] The inherited and yet culturally formed, or cultivated, sin Augustine describes shapes him in such a way that sin itself becomes a necessity,

> The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as

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[349] Augustine, *Confessionum*, lib. 1, cap. 10, linea 5, [non enim meliora eligens inoboediens eram, sed amore ludendi, amans in certaminibus superbas uictorias et scalpi aures meas falsis fabellis, quo prurirent ardentius, eadem curiositate magis magis que per oculos emicante in spectacula, ludos maiorum; quos tamen qui edunt, ea dignitate praediti excellunt, ut hoc paene omnes optent paruulis suis, quos tamen caedi libenter patiuntur, si spectaculis talibus impediantur ab studio, quo eos ad talia edenda cupiunt peruenire], trans. Chadwick *Confessions*, pp. 12-3.

[350] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 13, linea 22, 'et haec non flebam et flebam didonem extinctam ferro que extrema secutam, sequens ipse extrema condita tua relicto te et terra iens in terram: et si prohiberer ea legere, dolerem, quia non legerem quod dolerem.'

[351] *Ibid*, lib. 1, cap. 16, linea 14, 'et tamen, o flumen tartareum, iactantur in te fili hominum cum mercedibus, ut haec discant, et magna res agitur, cum hoc agitur publice in foro, in conspectu legum supra mercedem salaria decernentium, et saxa tua percutis et sonas dicens: 'hinc uerba discuntur, hinc adquiritur eloquentia rebus persuadendis sententiis que explicandis maxime necessaria.''

[352] *Ibid*, lib. 2, cap. 1, linea 3, 'amore amoris tui facio istuc, recolens uias meas nequissimas in amaritudine recogitationis meae, ut tu dulcescas mihi, dulcedo non fallax, dulcedo felix et secura, et conligens me a dispersione, in qua frustatim discissus sum, dum ab uno te auersus in multa euanui.'

> it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint.[353]

This account immediately raises a cluster of questions. Does the cultivation of inherited sin through fallen human culture create a sinful will, or a sinful nature, in Augustine? Does sin change human nature or will? The same nature or will that was, for Augustine 'in the beginning created blameless and without any defect'?[354]

To this question, Augustine's answer is an, albeit rather nuanced, 'no.' Augustine's negation, however, is not immediately clear. In terms of the will, Augustine does indeed recount how,

> A new will had begun to emerge in me, the will to worship you disinterestedly and enjoy you, O God, our only sure felicity; but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by inveterate custom. And so the two wills fought it out – the old and the new, the one carnal, the other spiritual – and in their struggle tore my soul apart.[355]

Augustine explains the character of these two wills with an important degree of specificity. He explains his new will, the will to worship God, as a will in which he, Augustine, shares a degree of agency. The other will, in contrast, is one in which Augustine is not really the agent. While Augustine exhibited agency in the acquisition

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[353] *Ibid*, lib. 8, cap. 5, linea 10, [quippe ex uoluntate peruersa facta est libido, et dum seruitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas. quibus quasi ansulis sibimet innexis - unde catenam appellaui - tenebat me obstrictum dura seruitus], trans. Chadwick *Confessions*, p. 140.

[354] See Elizabeth A. Clark 'Vitiated Seeds and Holy Vessels: Augustine's Manichean Past' in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 367-401.

[355] Augustine, *Confessionum*, lib. 8, cap. 5, linea 10, [sic intellegebam me ipso experimento id quod legeram, quomodo caro concupisceret aduersus spiritum et spiritus aduersus carnem, ego quidem in utroque, sed magis ego in eo, quod in me approbabam, quam in eo, quod in me improbabam], *The Confessions* trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 153-4. Preferring Boulding's translation '…and in their struggle tore my soul apart' over Chadwick's '…and their discord robbed my soul of all concentration.'

and formation in certain destructive habits, those habits have now stripped him of his agency. These sinful habits of his own making enslave him in the act of his own self-destruction. Augustine explains,

> I was aligned with both [wills], but more with the desires I approved in myself [those directed to worship of God] than with those I frowned upon, for in these latter I was not really the agent, since for the most part I was enduring them against my will rather than acting freely. All the same, the force of habit that fought against me had grown fiercer by my own doing, because I had come willingly to this point where I now wished not to be. And who has any right to object, when just punishment catches up with a sinner?[356]

Augustine further explicates this condition with the image of sleep,

> I was thus weighed down by the pleasant burden of the world in the way one commonly is thought to be asleep, and the thoughts with which I attempted to meditate upon you were like the efforts of people who are trying to wake up, but are overpowered and immersed once more in slumberous deeps.[357]

As such, sin does not function in Augustine as an alternative active competing will, but rather as the 'brute force of habit whereby the mind is dragged along and held fast against its will, and deservedly so because it slipped into the habit willingly.'[358]

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[356] *Ibid.,* lib. 8, cap. 5, linea 20, [sic intellegebam me ipso experimento id quod legeram, quomodo caro concupisceret aduersus spiritum et spiritus aduersus carnem, ego quidem in utroque, sed magis ego in eo, quod in me approbabam, quam in eo, quod in me improbabam. ibi enim magis iam non ego, quia ex magna parte id patiebar inuitus quam faciebam uolens. sed tamen consuetudo aduersus me pugnacior ex me facta erat, quoniam uolens quo nollem perueneram], *The Confessions*, trans. Boulding, p. 154.
[357] *Ibid*., lib. 8, cap. 5, linea 33, [ita sarcina saeculi, uelut somno assolet, dulciter premebar, et cogitationes, quibus meditabar in te, similes erant conatibus expergisci uolentium, qui tamen superati soporis altitudine remerguntur], *The Confessions*, trans. Boulding, pp. 153-4.
[358] *Ibid*., lib. 8, cap. 5, linea 50, [ex enim peccati est uiolentia consuetudinis, qua trahitur et tenetur etiam inuitus animus eo merito, quo in eam uolens inlabitur], *The Confessions*, trans. Boulding, pp. 155.

Turning from the will to the question of two natures, Augustine is more straight forward,

> Let them perish from your presence' (Ps. 67:3) O God, as do 'empty talkers and seducers' of the mind (Titus 1:10) who from the dividing of the will into two in the process of deliberation, deduce that there are two minds with two distinct natures, one good, the other bad. They really are evil themselves when they entertain these evil doctrines.[359]

Unlike the Manichess who declare that there are two natures in a person that account for two competing wills, Augustine is adamant that,

> In my own case, … , the self which willed to serve was identical with the self which was unwilling. It was I. I was neither wholly willing nor wholly unwilling. So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. The dissociation came about against my will. Yet this was not a manifestation of the nature of an alien mind but the punishment suffered in my own mind. And so it was 'not I' that brought this about 'but sin which dwelt in me' (Rom. 7: 17,20), sin resulting from the punishment of a more freely chosen sin, because I was a son of Adam.[360]

Precisely these two competing desires within the one person of Augustine is what he describes as 'renting apart' [dissipabar], or 'fragmenting', his soul.[361]

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[359] *Ibid*., lib. 8, cap. 10, linea 22, [si deliberet quisquam, utrum ad conuenticulum eorum pergat an ad theatrum, clamant isti: 'ecce duae naturae, una bona hac ducit, altera mala illac reducit. nam unde ista cunctatio sibimet aduersantium uoluntatum?' ego autem dico ambas malas, et quae ad illos ducit et quae ad theatrum reducit], trans. Chadwick *Confessions*, p. 148.
[360] *Ibid*., lib. 8, cap. 10, linea 16, [ideo me cum contendebam et dissipabar a me ipso, et ipsa dissipatio me inuito quidem fiebat, nec tamen ostendebat naturam mentis alienae, sed poenam meae. et ideo non iam ego operabar illam, sed quod habitabat in me peccatum de supplicio liberioris peccati, quia eram filius adam], trans. Chadwick, *Confessions*, pp. 148-9.
[361] *Ibid*., lib. 8, cap. 10, linea 16.

These multiple passages from Augustine's writings illuminate three key aspects of his deeply nuanced account of sin. First, for Augustine, sin is not merely inherited guilt. Sin is also a punishment for sin that is brought about through habituation in the earthly city. Second, the formation in sin that a person willingly takes on in the earthly city does not create an alternative competing active will. Rather, sin functions against the will to love God as a force of engrained, or acquired, habit. Third, sin, for Augustine, is not a second nature competing against the nature that God originally created in human beings. Rather, human beings are of one nature, and sin corrupts that nature by literally tearing it apart as a person enslaves themselves to the vacuous and hopelessly empty pursuit of pleasures in the earthly city.

It is worth pointing out here, if only briefly, echoes and differences in the way Augustine and Langland describe sin. First, Langland's depiction of Glotoun and his addiction to the community-instilled habits of the tavern deeply resonates with Augustine's view of sin as a flood of human custom. On the other hand, Langland's image of Coueytse, recast through the Brewer, is both similar to and notably different from that of Augustine. Couetyse and the Brewer figure an image of social formation in sin that is so vicious as to completely transform human nature into something less than human, something 'vnkynde' and ultimately unforgivable. While Augustine's account of sin is attentive to the vicious capacity of social formation in sin that Couetyse and the Brewer represent, the Bishop does not present a human person or community as capable of being so twisted by sin as to transform their human nature into something that is less than human.

Augustine would perhaps have more sympathy for the poem's later depiction of sin's effects as voiced by the Samaritan, ever conscious of the devastating possibility, but always holding out hope that the deepest reality in the human person is grace. That Langland departs from Augustine and the Samaritan in his figuration of Couetyse and the Brewer by allowing their imaginative possibility to exist does not, however, mean that Langland rejects his inherited tradition. Rather it gestures towards the rich abundance of Langland's inherited traditions regarding sin, and demonstrates one way in which the poem receives and recasts multiple strands within catholic thought with notable creativity.

§ Boethius

Augustine is, of course, not the only resource Langland has to draw upon for theories related to sin. Geoffrey Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* marks another influential voice in medieval discourse. One important way that Boethius's thinking about the vicious effects of sin differs from that of Augustine provides a possible resource, or alternate strand, of influence upon Langland's particular depiction of sin through Couetyse and the Brewer.

In the context of some warning words about the dangers of wealth, Boethius insists that,

> Indeed, the condition of human nature is just this; man towers above the rest of creation so long as he recognizes his own nature, and when he forgets it, he sinks lower than beasts.[362]

[362] Boethius *Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. L. Bieler Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 94 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), liber: 2, prosa: 5, par. 29, linea: 75, [Humanae quippe naturae ista condicio est ut tum

Here, Boethius entertains the possibility that the effects of sin are more destructive than Augustine displays above. Indeed, for Boethius, sin is capable of so forming a person as to make them less than human. Interestingly, just as Langland depicts Coueytse as the only one of the seven deadly sins who might be unforgiveable, Boethius' reflection on the potential for a human person to descend 'lower than the beasts' immediately proceeds his warnings about the negative influence of wealth. Boethius and Langland share a mutual anxiety over the corruptive potential of wealth, or covetousness, and the capacity of such sin to, in Boethius' terms, degrade human nature below that of beasts, or in Langland's, to twist human nature until a person becomes 'vnkynde', unforgiveable.

The conceptual framework of Boethius's particular mode of thinking is worth attending to in further detail in order to demonstrate more precisely how he understands the potential effects of sin. Such a framework is evident in a lengthy, but apposite, section of Book IV,

> A short while ago you learned that all that exists is in a state of unity and that goodness itself is unity; from which it follows that we must see everything that exists as good. This means that anything which turns away from goodness ceases to exist, and thus that the wicked cease to be what they once were. That they used to be human is shown by the human appearance of their body which still remains. So it was by falling into wickedness that they also lost their human nature. Now, since only goodness can raise a man above the level of human kind, it follows that it is proper that wickedness thrusts down to a level below mankind those whom it has dethroned

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tantum ceteris rebus cum se cognoscit excellat, eadem tamen infra bestias redigatur si se nosse desierit; nam ceteris animantibus sese ignorare naturae est, hominibus uitio uenit], English translation from *Boethius The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 36.

> from the condition of being human. The result is that you cannot think of anyone as human whom you see transformed by wickedness.[363]

For Boethius, humanity's turning away from goodness or God, an act Augustine explicitly calls sin, can actually lead to the loss of human nature.[364] Humans transformed by wickedness are quite literally 'dethroned from the condition of being human' such that they remain only human in the 'appearance of their body.'[365] In his figuration of Couetyse, Langland cannot help but describe the appearance of one who is human merely in bodily appearance, if only just,

> Thenne cam Couetyse ...
>
> He was bitelbrowed and baburlippid, with two blered eyes,
>
> And as a letherne pors lollede his chekes,
>
> Wel syddore then his chyn, ycheueled for elde,

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[363] *Ibid*., liber: 4, prosa: 3, par.: 14, linea: 38, [Hoc igitur modo quicquid a bono deficit esse desistit. Quo fit ut mali desinant esse quod fuerant. Sed fuisse homines adhuc ipsa humani corporis reliqua species ostentat; quare uersi in malitiam humanam quoque amisere naturam. Sed cum ultra homines quemque prouehere sola probitas possit, necesse est ut quos ab humana condicione deiecit infra homines merito detrudat improbitas; euenit igitur ut quem transformatum uitiis uideas hominem aestimare non possis], trans.Watts *Consolation*, p. 94.

[364] *Ibid*., liber: 4, prosa: 2, par.: 33, linea: 89, 'Quod quidem cuipiam mirum forte uideatur, ut malos, qui plures hominum sunt, eosdem non esse dicamus; sed ita sese res habet. Nam qui mali sunt eos malos esse non abnuo; sed eosdem esse pure atque simpliciter nego. Nam uti cadauer hominem mortuum dixeris, simpliciter uero hominem appellare non possis, ita uitiosos malos quidem esse concesserim, sed esse absolute nequeam confiteri. Est enim quod ordinem retinet seruat que naturam; quod uero ab hac deficit esse etiam, quod in sua natura situm est, derelinquit. ['Some may perhaps think it strange that we say that wicked men, who form the majority of men, do not exist; but that is how it is. I am not trying to deny the wickedness of the wicked; what I do deny is that their existence is absolute and complete existence. Just as you might call a corpse a dead man, but couldn't simply call it a man, so I would agree that the wicked are wicked, but could not agree that they have unqualified existence. A thing exists when it keeps its proper place and preserves its own nature. Anything which departs from this ceases to exist, because its existence depends on the preservation of its nature.'], trans. Watts *Consolation*, p. 91. This view, that human beings can be so degraded by sin, is evident pictorially in many medieval *mappa mundi*'s. See for example, the Hereford map (which still hangs in Hereford Cathedral not far from the Malvern Hills where *Piers Plowman* begins) which depicts part-human part-beast figures wandering about in regions perceived barbaric by the map's makers.

[365] See also Rik Van Nieuwenhove *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 31.

And as a bondemannes bacoun his berd was yshaue...[366]

This horrific possibility of sin's effects is not only evident in Boethius, but is also evident in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. A brief excursus will further situate this Boethian trajectory of Langland's imagination.

While on the whole Thomas Aquinas closes down this Boethian potential of sin's effects, at least in one particular moment of his *Summa Theologiae* Thomas offers a rather Boethian account of sin. Thomas asks the question 'Whether it is lawful to kill sinners?'[367] Thomas responds 'yes', with an affirmation that echoes his position on the justification of killing heretics.[368] Thomas is quite clear:

> I answer that, As stated above (A.1), it is lawful to kill dumb animals, in so far as they are naturally directed to man's use, as the imperfect is directed to the perfect. Now every part is directed to the whole, as imperfect to perfect, wherefore every part is naturally for the sake of the whole. For this reason we observe that if the health of the whole body demands the excision of a member, through its being decayed or infectious to the other members, it will be both praiseworthy and advantageous to have it cut away. Now every individual person is compared to the whole community, as part to whole. Therefore if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good, since *a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump* (1 Cor. V. 6).[369]

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[366] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, C-Version VI.196-201, [Then came Covetousness ... / He was beetle-browed and blubber-lipped, with two bleary eyes, / And his cheeks hung on his face like a leather purse, / Quivering with age well below his chin; / Like a bondsman's bristly bacon his beard was shaved...].
[367] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.64.2.
[368] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.11.3-4.
[369] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.64.2.co, [Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut dictum est, licitum est occidere animalia bruta inquantum ordinantur naturaliter ad hominum usum, sicut imperfectum ordinatur ad

What is interesting about Thomas' reflections on this question, 'Whether it is lawful to kill sinners?', is the particular way he describes the nature of the sinner who must be killed. Indeed, his description leaves open the possibility of the total degradation, or even eradication, of the *imago dei* in a human being similar to Langland's depiction of Couetyse, as well as that of Boethius. Thomas writes,

> By sinning man departs from the order of reason, and consequently falls away from the dignity of his manhood, in so far as he is naturally free, and exists for himself, and he falls into the slavish state of the beasts, by being disposed of according as he is useful to others. ... Hence, although it be evil in itself to kill a man so long as he preserve his dignity, yet it may be good to kill a man who has sinned, even as it is to kill a beast. For a bad man is worse than a beast, and is more harmful, as the Philosopher states (*Polit. i.* 1 and *Ethic.* vii. 6).[370]

Thus Thomas, like Langland and Boethius, seems to leave open the possibility that sin can so degrade a human's dignity as to reduce them not only below the order of the human, but below the order of beast, and thereby justify their being put to death. In such a thought-world, the putting to death of a sinner would not be murder because that

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perfectum. Omnis autem pars ordinatur ad totum ut imperfectum ad perfectum. Et ideo omnis pars naturaliter est propter totum. Et propter hoc videmus quod si saluti totius corporis humani expediat praecisio alicuius membri, puta cum est putridum et corruptivum aliorum, laudabiliter et salubriter abscinditur. Quaelibet autem persona singularis comparatur ad totam communitatem sicut pars ad totum. Et ideo si aliquis homo sit periculosus communitati et corruptivus ipsius propter aliquod peccatum, laudabiliter et salubriter occiditur, ut bonum commune conservetur, modicum enim fermentum totam massam corrumpit, ut dicitur I ad Cor. V], trans. by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province in *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948), p. 1461.

[370] Aquinas, ST IIa-IIae q.64.2.ad.3, ['Ad tertium dicendum quod homo peccando ab ordine rationis recedit, et ideo decidit a dignitate humana, prout scilicet homo est naturaliter liber et propter seipsum existens, et incidit quodammodo in servitutem bestiarum, ut scilicet de ipso ordinetur secundum quod est utile aliis; secundum illud Psalm., homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit, comparatus est iumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis; et Prov. XI dicitur, qui stultus est serviet sapienti. Et ideo quamvis hominem in sua dignitate manentem occidere sit secundum se malum, tamen hominem peccatorem occidere potest esse bonum, sicut occidere bestiam, peior enim est malus homo bestia, et plus nocet, ut philosophus dicit, in I Polit. et in VII Ethic].

which is being killed is less that human, indeed, less than beast. This is a terrifying possibility. And one, admittedly, that Thomas closes down in other places in the *Summa Theologiae*, specifically his account of the effects of sin in ST Ia-IIae q.85.1.co and most explicitly in ST Ia-IIae q.85.2, 'Whether the entire good of human nature can be destroyed by sin.' In ST Ia-IIae q.85.1.co the 'good of human nature' is presented as threefold. Only humans' original justice is destroyed by sin, the other two aspects are either unaffected or merely diminished. His explication is further nuanced in the following article, ST Ia-IIae q.85.2. That Thomas closes down this possibility is further evident in Ia-IIae q.63.1.co, 'That which is in human beings by nature is common to all human beings and not taken away by sin because even in demons the natural goods persist (*bona naturalia manet*).' Or more explicitly in Ia q.48.4.co 'The readiness of the soul for grace is always diminished [by sins]...yet it is never completely removed...because it follows from the soul's nature.'[371] Fergus Kerr captures Thomas's sense of the limitations of sin's effects well, drawing upon Bernard Quelquejeu, Kerr writes,

> Quelquejeu rephrases the axiom, as follows: 'sin presupposes nature, doesn't remove or destroy it but diminishes its capacity'. That is to say, sin cannot destroy the ontological structure of human nature, or change the created subject's species-specific nature – but it certainly restricts, wounds, and disorders the human creature.[372]

This account of sin's effects makes it difficult to see how Thomas can come to the conclusions he does in ST IIa-IIae q.64.2.reply 3. Nonetheless, the door stands open in ST IIa-IIae q.64.2.ad.3, as it does for both Langland and Boethius, with haunting

[371] Aquinas, ST Ia q.48.4.co, [semper magis et magis minitur habilitas animae ad gratiam...neque tamen tollitur totaliter ab anima...praedicta habilitas quia consequitur naturam ipsius].
[372] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 145.

implications. These tensions within the *Summa Theologiae* gesture to what Henri de Lubac refers to as the instability of Thomas' synthesis.[373]

Boethius's account of the potential effects of sin, a vision also evident in the thought of Aquinas, and Boethius' anxiety over the corruptive power of wealth provide a fruitful and resonant potential influence upon Langland's figure of Couetyse as well as the Brewer. Augustine's nuanced account of the way sin is cultivated through floods of human custom stands as another source that resonates deeply with Langland's depiction, not only of the potential effects of sin, but also of the processes through which sin is cultivated and developed through fallen human communities and social practices. It is a significant achievement that Langland is able to couple both Boethius and Augustine's theories of sin so vividly in the figure of Couetyse and the Brewer, and perhaps not surprising that Langland's imagination includes some of the tensions that Aquinas' own reflections upon sin fail to resolve completely. One further theological resource Langland draws upon for his incredibly complex account of sin remains to be considered.

§ Anselm

Anselm of Canterbury's dissemination through the later-middle ages, especially through vernacular writers, is far from a fragmentary or piece-meal inheritance.[374] This section aims to demonstrate the extent to which Langland inherits a particular and nuanced strand of Anselm's understanding of sin and restitution, and in so doing show

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[373] See Henri de Lubac *Surnaturel*: *Etudes historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946) pp. 435-436.

[374] Margaret Healy-Varley, 'Ansem's Afterlife and the Middle English *De Custodia Interioris Hominis*' in *Saint Anselm of Canterbury and His Legacy* edited by Giles E. M. Gasper & Ian Logan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012) 1-3. Indeed, Healy-Varley maintains, 'The pastoral Anselm was no less 'Anselmian' for having been adapted to lay use or translated into vernacular languages, but rather more so.'

that *Piers Plowman* stands as one among many examples of the range and pervasiveness of Anselm's influence upon late-medieval theological discourse. As will become more evident through the following analysis, Langland's vision of the church bears a significant debt to Anslem's theology of the atonement.

Jaroslav Pelikan helpfully situates Anselm's theory of sin and salvation in the context of Anselm's rejection of the popular medieval theory pertaining to the rights of the devil.[375] This intellectual history is of critical importance when approaching the Archbishop's account of sin. *Piers Plowman* participates in Anselm's rejection of the rights of the devil theory, but my concern in this section is to explore the particular way in which Langland receives and develops not only Anselm's account of sin, but also the specific role that Anselm ascribes to restitution.[376] I will argue that *Piers Plowman* receives and develops Anselm's understanding of sin and restitution by taking it beyond the scope of the relationship between God and humanity in order to conceive of the practice of restitution as one between both God and humans, and also between humans and humans, as, for Langland at least, a necessary means of entering into the salvation offered by Christ.

Anselm's preferred image for thinking about sin is inflected slightly differently than that of Augustine or Boethius. In his influential work *Cur deus homo*, Anselm locates the problem of sin in the disruption of the beautiful order that God intends for

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[375] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine* vol. 3, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1978), pp. 135-57. This is, of course, evident in Anselm himself, see *Cur Deus homo*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, *Opera omnia*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946-61), vol. 2, Book I, Chapter 7: 'Quod nullam diabolus habebat iustitiam adversus hominem; et quare videatur habuisse cur deus hoc modo hominem liberaret' ['That the devil had no jurisdiction over man. Why he might seem to have it, causing God, as a result, to set us free in his way']. See also Giles E. M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2004), pp. 164-73.
[376] See especially the discourse between Christ and hell's minion in Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus XX.269-469.

creation. Creation, for Anselm, has a divinely ordained purpose, 'the rational creation was created righteous, and was so created for the purpose of being happy in the fact of God's delighted approval.'[377] Human beings participate in this purpose, for Anselm, in the following way,

> When such a being [creature] desires what is right, he is honoring God, not because he is bestowing anything upon God, but because he is voluntarily subordinating himself to his will and governance, maintaining his own proper station in life within the natural universe, and, to the best of his ability, maintaining the beauty of the universe itself.[378]

God's beautiful and well-ordered creation is disrupted 'when a rational being does not wish for what is right.' Indeed, Anselm explains, such a misguided wishing 'dishonours God, with regard to himself [the creature], since he [the creature] is not willingly subordinating himself to God's governance, and is disturbing, as far as he is able, the order and beauty of the universe.'[379] This disordering that comes from not rendering to God what is due to him (*redde quod debes*) is precisely how Anselm defines sin,

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[377] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, ed. Schmitt Vol. 2, lib. 1, cap. 9, linea, 29, [Rationalem creaturam iustam factam esse et ad hoc, ut deo fruendo beata esset, non negas], English translation from *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 277.
[378] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 15, linea 3, [Quae cum vult quod debet, deum honorat; non quia illi aliquid confert, sed quia sponte se eius voluntati et dispositioni subdit, et in rerum universitate ordinem suum et eiusdem universitatis pulchritudinem, quantum in ipsa est, servat], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 288.
[379] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 15, linea 6, [Cum vero non vult quod debet, deum, quantum ad illam pertinet, inhonorat, quoniam non se sponte subdit illius dispositioni, et universitatis ordinem et pulchritudinem, quantum in se est, perturbat], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 288.

> Someone who does not render to God this honour due to him (*redde quod debes*) [that is, the act of the creature subjecting its will to God] is taking away from God what is his, and dishonouring God, and this is what it is to sin.[380]

Importantly, Anselm qualifies this by maintaining that the disruption of the created order by the creature 'does not harm or besmirch the honour of God in the slightest extent.'[381] Rather,

> As long as [the creature who has sinned] does not repay what he has taken away [that is, not taken away from God, but rather the disruption of God's beautiful and well-ordered creation by the creature], [then the creature] remains in a state of guilt. And it is not sufficient merely to repay what has been taken away; rather, [the creature] ought to pay back more than he took, in proportion to the insult which he has inflicted... restitution.[382]

Sin, for Anselm, is described as the creature's disruption of the divine ordering of creation. This disruption does not harm or besmirch the honor of God, but rather renders the creature guilty for disrupting God's good creation.

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[380] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 11, linea 19, [Hunc honorem debitum qui deo non reddit, aufert deo quod suum est, et deum exhonorat; et hoc est peccare. Quamdiu autem non solvit quod rapuit, manet in culpa. Hunc honorem debitum qui deo non reddit, aufert deo quod suum est, et deum exhonorat; et hoc est peccare. Quamdiu autem non solvit quod rapuit, manet in culpa], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 283. Anselm provides another, overlapping, image of sin that gestures towards his inheritance of a particularly Augustinian strand discussed above, describing sin as punishment for sin. This is evident in Anselm's use of the image of the pit. See *Cur Deus homo*, lib. 1, cap. 24. An image that differs drastically from the pit imagery that Julian of Norwich uses to describe humanity's fallen condition of sin in her *Showings*, pp. 51-4.

[381] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 15, linea 6, [licet potestatem aut dignitatem dei nullatenus laedat aut decoloret], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 288.

[382] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 11, linea 21, [Nec sufficit solummodo reddere quod ablatum est, sed pro contumelia illata plus debet reddere quam abstulit. Sicut enim qui laedit salutem alterius, non sufficit si salutem restituit, nisi pro illata doloris iniuria recompenset aliquid: ita qui honorem alicuius violat non sufficit honorem reddere, si non secundum exhonorationis factam molestiam aliquid, quod placeat illi quem exhonoravit, restituit], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 283.

The specific character of this guilt, needs to be further explicated. For Anselm, this guilt can be resolved in one of two ways. Sin must either be paid for through the satisfaction of restitution or through punishment.[383] These two possibilities are direct correlates of Anselm's position that human sin cannot harm or besmirch God's honour,

> It is impossible for God to lose his honour. For either a sinner of his own accord repays what he owes or God takes it from him against his – the sinner's – will. This is because either a man of his own free will demonstrates the submission which he owes to God by not sinning, or alternatively by paying recompense for his sin, or else God brings him into submission to himself against his will, by subjecting him to torment, and in this way he shows that he is Lord, something which the man himself refuses to admit voluntarily.[384]

Satisfaction of restitution and punishment are the only two possibly ways in which God deals with sin, and this is, again, because of the particular way Anselm perceives of order. The creature owes to God the submission of its will, and this can only be restored by satisfying restitution, a repayment above and beyond what was not rightly rendered, or else submission will be imposed upon the creature by God through punishment. That these are the only two options is because, for Anselm, God's mercy cannot be self-contradictory.[385]

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[383] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 12, linea 11, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 284.
[384] Ibid*.,* lib. 1, cap. 14, linea 8, [Deum impossibile est honorem suum perdere. Aut enim peccator sponte solvit quod debet, aut deus ab invito accipit. Nam aut homo debitam subiectionem deo sive non peccando sive quod peccat solvendo, voluntate spontanea exhibet, aut deus eum invitum sibi torquendo subicit et sic se dominum eius esse ostendit, quod ipse homo voluntate fateri recusat], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 287.
[385] *Ibid.*, lib. 1, cap. 24, linea 13, 'At si dimittit quod invito erat ablaturus, propter impotentiam reddendi quod sponte reddere debet: relaxat deus poenam et facit beatum hominem propter peccatum, quia habet quod debet non habere. Nam ipsam impotentiam debet non habere, et idcirco, quamdiu illam habet sine satisfactione, peccatum est illi. Verum huiusmodi misericordia dei nimis est contraria iustitiae illius, quae

The problem, for Anselm, is that 'no one can pay except God, and no one ought to pay except man'.[386] This situation provides Anselm with the logical ground upon which he articulates the necessity of the Incarnation, 'it is necessary that a God-Man should pay [the debt owed to God] for human sin.'[387] Anselm's logic is neither intended to force God's action by a necessity outside God's-self, nor is it intended to provide the ground for later developments such as substitutionary atonement. In fact, Anselm explicitly closes this latter door off, 'God the Father did not treat that man [Christ] as you apparently understand him to have done; nor did he hand over an innocent man to be killed in place of the guilty party.'[388] Rather, the force driving Anselm's logic is, again, that of God's beautiful created order, and this gestures to the former. Anselm does not suggest that the Incarnation is a necessity external to God's-self. Instead, Anselm understands God in such a way that God will not allow the beauty of his well-ordered creation to be disrupted by sinful humanity. Through the Incarnation, God does not merely restore the original order and beauty of creation, but rather the Incarnation makes a sort aesthetic restitution. That is, the Incarnation restores and adds more beauty to God's well-ordered creation. As such, the Incarnation is necessary only insofar as it is consistent with the outpouring and manifestation of God's goodness.

To return to Langland, we may now see how the exchange between the people, the Brewer and Conscience that occurs during Conscience's offer of the Eucharist in

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non nisi poenam permittit reddi propter peccatum. Quapropter quemadmodum deum sibi esse contrarium, ita hoc modo illum esse misericordem impossibile est.'

[386] *Ibid*., lib. 2, cap. 6, linea 16, [nec hoc esse valet, nisi fiat praedicta satisfactio, quam nec potest facere nisi deus nec debet nisi homo: necesse est ut eam faciat deus-homo], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 320.

[387] *Ibid*., lib. 2, cap. 7, linea 14, [Ut ergo hoc faciat deus-homo, necesse est eundem ipsum esse perfectum deum et perfectum hominem, qui hanc satisfactionem facturus est; quoniam eam facere nec potest nisi verus deus, nec debet nisi verus homo '], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 320.

[388] *Ibid*., lib. 1, cap. 8, linea 11, [Deus pater non, quemadmodum videris intelligere, hominem illum tractavit aut innocentem pro nocente morti tradidit], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, p. 275.

Passus XXI shows Langland's participation in the Anselmian theme of restitution, *redde quod debes,* or rendering what is due. That is to say, *Piers Plowman* participates in the idea that restitution is necessary to restore the disruption of God's beautiful creation that comes about through human sin. However, where Anselm stops short of certain ecclesial or practical implications, Langland refuses to imagine the theme of *redde quod debes* without them.[389] For Langland, rendering what is due is not an activity that occurs simply through the mystery of the Incarnation. Rather, rendering what is due is an ongoing practice that the church is ordered to embody and witness. The church, for Langland, because of its mystical identity as the body of Christ, is wrapped up in the processes not only of offering what is due to God through worship, but also of forming a community that offers back to itself and the world the love and honour appropriately due to fellow human beings. As such, it is not only the Incarnation that offers a sort of aesthetic restitution, but also the ongoing witness of the self-giving church. Langland's vision here stresses the reality of sin while simultaneously imagining the possibilities created by the mystery of Christ's body the church in a fallen world. Put another way, for Langland, God's grace is mediated through the *church*; rather than *kynde* as mediated through nature, *a la* Davis. Here, for Langland, it is God's grace manifest through the mystical union of Christ's body the church and its praxis of receiving, sharing in and being transformed into Christ's body through the Eucharist that Langland's Christological vision of the church becomes the bearer and mediator sweeping creation up into the divine. As will become more explicit in chapter three, language, poetry and specifically *Langland's* form of poetry are vital for the representation of this mystery.

[389] Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 149. See also chapters four and six.

§ Will's turnings

Before exploring the poem's representation of sin's cure, it is important first to briefly consider two additional instances in which a figure's identity is completely 'turned', subsumed by a rival identity, because both moments work to prepare the poem's audience to imagine not only sin but also its cure as thoroughly social, ecclesial, Christocentric and sacramental. Couetyse and the Brewer are not the only two figures whose turning Langland depicts. Will, the dreamer, who is both a figuration of the poet and also a personification of the willing faculty is turned no less than twice in the poem. This next section recalls these two moments of turning and considers both their causes and effects. These instances of turning not only offer further depth into the poem's complex and layered representation of sin, but also provides hints, by way of the diverse modes through which the poem represents the dreamer's being restored from his turning, into the way the poem aims to train its audience to think through the communities, practices and habits of mind necessary for a person to be reformed after being turned through sin.

The first instance of Will's turning occurs between Passus XI and XII through his encounter with Rechelesnesse. This scene demonstrates the way the dreamer's turning is the specific result of Will's seduction into a mode of thought that rejects clergie and then confuses a theological concept of destiny with an arbitrary notion of fate. Up until this point in poem, Will has wandered his way into the company of Wit, Dame Study, Scripture and finally Clergie and received a range of teaching concerning the meaning of dowell.[390] His instruction stops short when he is scolded by Scripture, falls into a dream

[390] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.1-159.

within a dream, is 'rauysched' and fetched by Fortune 'into the lond of longyng.'[391] Fortune and his two attendants *Concupiscencia carnis* and Coueytise-of-yes collude to lead Will into a lifetime of pleasure, with the promise that 'The man that [Fortune] liketh to helpe myhte nat myshappe.'[392] Such a promise, of course, rings both false and ironic to readers familiar with Book II of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and the pervasive medieval image of Lady Fortune and her wheel. To remind Will of this, Elde appears foreshadowing the poem's conclusion to warn him that in the end, Fortune will forsake the pilgrim and 'to moche perel the brynge.'[393]

It is in this moment that Will meets the figure of Rechelesnesse. Rechelesnesse tells young Will not to worry about a far off Elde, but more substantively, Rechelesnesse argues,

> Were hit al soth that ye seyn, thow Scripture and thow Clergie,
> Y leue neuere that lord ne lady that lyueth her on erthe
> Sholde sitte in goddis sihte ne se god in his blisse.[394]

Rechelesnesse's argument is grounded on a particular understanding of predestination derived from certain unnamed preachers,

> Predestinaet thei prechen, prechours that this sheweth,
> Or *prescit* inparfit, pult out of grace,
> Vnwriten for som wikkednesse, as holy writ sheweth.[395]

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[391] The term 'rauysched' is the same term Will uses to refer to his first sight of Holy Church, but also Lady Mede. It is a word often used in vernacular mystical texts, particularly Richard Rolle, to refer to the way the spiritual journey toward God involves the soul being 'rauysched' by increasing degree though its beholding of God, see Nicholas Watson *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Will is fetched by fortune in at XI.160-70.
[392] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XI.180-5, ['The man whom I like will never suffer mishaps'].
[393] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.192, ['…put you in great danger.'].
[394] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.199-201, ['Were everything you say true, you Scripture and you Clergy, / I believe that never lord or lady that lives here on earth / Will sit in God's sight or see God in bliss'].

On this account, human beings are quite literally predetermined towards heavenly bliss or hell regardless of their virtue or wickedness in life. Rechelesnesse confirms this by pointing out that Solomon and Aristotle were both committed to lives of virtue, and yet 'holi churche, as Y here, haldeth bothe in helle!'[396] Rechelesnesse provides further examples of Mary, David and Paul whose lechery, adultery and murder did not prevent them from becoming saints.[397] On the authority of these witnesses, Rechelesnesse determines that 'the gifte of god which is grace of fortune' and thereby 'Ac me were leuere, by oure lord, a lyppe of goddes grace / Thenne al the kynde wyt that ye can bothe and kunnyng of youre bokes.'[398] Grace is a free, but also arbitrary, gift of God given to some and yet not others. Clergie itself is, on this account, incapable of equipping human beings in the way Ymaginatif and the Samaritan will later describe. And Rechelesnesse, again, cites Scriptural witness for his position. He recalls and paraphrases the words of Christ,

> 'Thogh ye come bifore kynges and clerkes of the lawe
> Beth nat aferd of that folk for Y shal yeue yow tonge
> And connyng and clergie to conclude he alle.'[399]

In a mode that completely contradicts the teaching of Ymagintif and the Samaritan as outlined in chapter 2.1, Rechlessness maintains that clergie is a gift of God given directly, as a wholly unmediated deposit, requiring no agency, training or formation on the part of the recipient. This particular mode of clergie's transference is further witnessed, so

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[395] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.205-7, ['They preach men are predestinate, preachers who declare this, / Or beforehand known to be imperfect, thrust out of grace, / Not written down because of some wickedness, as holy writ shows.'].
[396] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.218.
[397] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.261-9.
[398] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.224-5.
[399] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.276-8, ['Though you come before kings and clerks of the law / Do not be afraid of these people for I shall give you tongue / And cunning and learning to refute all such.'].

Rechelesnesse argues, by the fate of the many workers who helped build Noah's ark and yet were destroyed by the flood.[400] Such workers relate allegorically to those workers who now build up the ark of the church, and yet will not themselves be saved. Thus, Rechelesnesse presents Will with a particular reading of Scripture that makes God's grace indistinguishable from an arbitrary gift of fate.

Will is swept away by this teaching, 'Of Dowel ne of Dobet no deynte me ne thouhte, / Ne Clergie ne his conseile – Y counted hit ful litel!'[401] Will is not only persuaded by Rechelesnesse, but transformed. Indeed, his identity becomes wholly subsumed by and indistinguishable from this figure. His transformation is described by Elde and Holynesse who use the particular language of turning, 'Allas, eye!' quod Elde and Holynesse bothe, / 'That wit shal turne to wrechednesse for Wil hath al his wille!'[402] So Will's very capacity to think has been turned, inverted, not unlike Conscience's turning which results from his dismissal of Clergie, and this has disturbing consequences for Will,

> Couetyse-of-yes conforted me aftur and saide,
> 'Rechelesnesse, reche the neuere; by so thow riche were,
> Haue no consience how thou come to good – confesse the to som frere;
> He shal asoile the thus sone how so euere thow wynne hit.
> For while Fortune is thy frende freres wol the louye
> And frestene the in ther fraternite and for the byseche
> To here priour prouincial his pardoun to haue

[400] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.236-251.
[401] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.311-2, ['Do-well and Do-better seemed to me worthless, / And to Clergy and his counsel – I gave next to no credit!'].
[402] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XII.1-2 ['Aw, too bad!' said Old Age and Holiness together, / 'That wit will turn to wretchedness because Will has it all his way!'].

And preye for the pol by pol yf thow be *peccuniosus.*'[403]

As evident from the grammar of the poetry, Will has now become the figure of Rechelesnesse. Furthermore, this figure whose wit is turned to wretchedness is further instructed to 'Haue no consience.' All his cognitive faculties, both of intellect and that middle term conscience, have been overcome, and Will/Rechelesnesse is encouraged to submit his eternal fate to friars who will pardon him in exchange for payment.

This scene thus provides a detailed account of a particular hermeneutic capable of constructing a theology of predestination necessary to underpin the transactional economy of salvation depicted by Chaucer's Pardoner, a process that establishes and leads to the dissolution of Vnity at the end of *Piers Plowman*. In point of fact, the particular theology Rechelesnesse constructs cannot even offer justification for participation in the friars' economy of pardon and exchange. If grace is equivalent to fate, then payment in this life can surely not effect salvation. However, Rechelesnesse's effect on Will/Rechelesness has co-opted his intellectual faculties of both wit and conscience leaving him utterly incapable of resisting the manipulations and contradictions of this theology of sin and salvation. Will/Rechelesnesse attempts to comfort himself with Rechelesnesse's promise,

'Aren noen rather yraueschid fro the rihte bileue
Comuneliche then clerkes most knowyng in konnyg
Ne none sanere ysaued ne none saddere in bileue

[403] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XII.3-9, ['Covetousness-of-eyes then comforted me, / And said, 'Recklessness, never you mind as long as you're rich, / Have no conscience about how you came into wealth – confess yourself to some friar; / He will absolve you as soon no matter how you won it. / For as long as Fortune's your friend friars will love you / And join you to their fraternity and intercede in your behalf / To their prior provincial for his pardon for you / And pray for you, by the head, if you're *peccuniosus*'].

Then ploughmen and pastours and pore comune peple.'[404]

However, as the witness of Vnity, Ymagenatyf and the Samaritan argue, such a promise is not as sure as Rechelesnesse perceives.

The forces of Fortune and the debate with Elde return again in the poem's closing passus with familiar effects upon the dreamer in a second scene depicting another turning in Will's journey. Will, having met Nede, falls into another dream. A dream in which anti-christ and Pride wage war on Conscience, who has in turn called the commons into Vnity to make their stand. Kynde rains a range of natural disasters upon the people, until Conscience begs for respite. And it is at this point that the figure of Fortune returns to join the company of forces attacking a reeling and ailing community behind the walls of fortress church, Vnity. Fortune quickly pairs up with Lyf, as a mistress, making the dreamer the familiar promise of 'long lyf.'[405] Fortune and Lyf do not merely aim to distract Will from the fear of death and Elde, but tempt him 'so foryete sorwe and yeue nat of synne.'[406] That is to say, Fortune and Lyf tempt Will to forget and ignore sin through the promise of a long and healthy life secure from the whims and contingencies of creaturely existence. At this, Conscience calls upon Elde who fights off Wanhope, the wife of Fortune and Lyf's bastard son Sleuthe. Elde pursues Lyf, who retreats to Fisyk, killing him and thereby reminding the audience, in a way that is as true in the twenty-first century as it is in the fourteenth, that advances of modern medicine can never get a person out of life alive.[407] Fleeing from Fisyk, Lyf carries on to Reuel to forstall anxiety

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[404] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.289-92, ['None are more readily ravished from the right belief / Generally than clerks most steeped in knowledge, / Nor any sooner saved or more steadfast in belief / Than plowmen and pastors and poor common people'].
[405] Compare XXII.111 and XI.177-8.
[406] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.154-5.
[407] Langland punctuates this irony and false promise with a brilliant image in the B-version, wherein Fisyk gives Will a glass helmet for protection.

over Elde with worldly pleasure. Will's catechesis at the hands of Rechelesnesse has lingering effects in the thought processes of the dreamer, because as the following lines demonstrate, the reunion with Fortune, despite Fortune's apparent series of failures, succeeds in distracting the dreamer from Elde long enough to again subsume his identity, this time into the figure of Lyf,

> And in hope of [Lyf's] hele goed herte he hente
> And roed so to Reuel, a ryche place and a murye –
> The compeny of Comfort men clepede hit som tyme –
> And Elde aftur hym, and ouer myn heuede yede
> And made me balled bifore and baer on the crowne
> So harde he yede ouer myn heued hit wol be sene euere![408]

Elde attacks the dreamer/Lyf knocking out his teeth, his hearing, his virility and infecting him with gout. It is this beaten down figure to whom Deth draws near. And in this state, the dreamer/Lyf, now in a condition as dire as that of *Semyiuef* three passus earlier, cries out to Kynde.

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Complex visions of sin and its processes emerge through *Piers Plowman* and the poem engages distinctively with a range of theories of sin developed in medieval discourse in important, and currently underappreciated, ways.[409] Langland's poetry, and

[408] Langland, *Piers Plowman* XXII.180-5, ['And in hope of his health he took good heart / And rode off to Revel, a rich, fun place, / (The Good Times Company, men once called it), / And Old Age was right behind him, and ran over my head / And erased my hair line and put a shine on my crown; / So roughly he rode over my head it will always show.'].

[409] Nicolette Zeeman, *Medieval Discourse of Desire*, considers the representation of sin and the Fall in *Piers Plowman* through the Tree of Charity sequence (Passus XVI B version). She argues that a 'governing proposition of *Piers Plowman*' is that 'sin brings its own rewards' (1). *Ibid.,* pp. 6-7 sums up Langland's

the particular way in which he uses personification, allows him to depict sin not as a monolithic vice, but rather through a series of overlapping figures. This habit of employing overlapping images to depict the complexity of sin is a technique I showed both Augustine and Anselm to employ. While Augustine and Anselm make good use of this practice, Langland's poetry allows him to do so in a unique way. Specifically, Langland's poetic mode allows for a casting of sin in a range of ways that can drastically differ, and possibly even lead to contradiction, without inviting judgments upon the discourse as either contradictory or incoherent.

The figures of Glotoun and Couetyse collude to present sin as a series of community forming, and community perpetuating, practices. Glotoun is seduced not merely by Betty's invitation, but by his addiction to the community of the tavern: its games, its drink and its fellowship. Couetyse, on the other hand, demonstrates the particular way in which sin is learned, or acquired, by means of apprenticeship. Couetyse represents sin as an acquired craft that develops and adapts as it is introduced to new communities. Such adaptation in turn allows sin to reproduce itself in new and more vicious ways. While the paired figurations of sin through Glotoun and *Semyuief* as well

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figuration of sin and the Fall as represented in the Tree of Charity sequence as follows: 'In this episode Langland regards the Fall from a number of angels, each of which is written into the structure of the narrative itself. First, he sees this sin as somehow inevitable, determined by a force other than human intentionality; second, the broad tendency of Langland's perspective remains highly psychological; third, he sees sin and its consequences in terms of multiple forms of loss and suffering; fourth, he suggests that this loss and its suffering engender desire – not just as they elicit the renewing gifts of redemption and grace, but also as they effect psychological renewals of desire in the soul itself... The Fall enabled human beings to *knowe* and to *feele* the condition of human beings within the world, and, by doing so, to *knowe*, *feele* and desire the *wele* that God offers'. While Zeeman's thesis is both intriguing and suggestive, her emphasis on the psychological runs the risk of ignoring the political implications of sin, and thereby threatens to sideline the Christological and ecclesial nature of grace which are constitutive of Langland's hope in the salvation of humanity from the effects of sin and the Fall. Zeeman, of course, is interested in the fascinating thesis that Langland, thinking within the tradition associated with *felix culpa*, is open to sin itself being a sort of remedy for sin; that loss, failure and rebuke can renew, create and inspire new forms of desire (*Ibid*., pp. 18-9, 21, 43-5, 47, 51). For a similar assessment of Zeeman's account of sin in the *Piers Plowman* see Kate Crassons *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 305 n. 16.

as Couetyse and the Brewer suggest distinct possibilities and limits for sin's effects, both pairs depict sin as devastating the spiritual economy of humanity through the very *material* economies of tavern, guild and monetary exchange. That is to say, *Piers Plowman's* figurations of sin present sin in a way that is ever mindful of the material and communal practices through which sin not only manifests itself, but also grows, transforms and weaves itself into the fabric of particular societies. My own interpretation of Langland's depiction of sin emphasizes Rebecca Davis' keen observation that Langland's poetics 'revalues the terrestrial and the contingent, not by demarcating the observable world from the unknowable transcendant, but by bringing God himself [and I would add, sin] to earth.' I have argued that it is paradoxically both sin and the grace manifest through the church – rather than *kynde* – that make the mundane matter by revealing the void between Creator and creature while simultaneously anticipating the closing of that void through the mystery of the church, the Eucharist and the body of Christ. The present thesis interprets Langland's poetic attention to be speaking not only to the way in which his 'makings', his poetry, are a moral act, but emphasizes the way his poetry, his 'making', is designed to teach its audience that ecclesiology and participation in the mystery and fullness of the sacrament – that is participating in forms of life ordered by and through the community that receives, shares and becomes Christ's body through the Eucharist – is vital for human beings to be swept up into the mystery of God's healing and the restoration of God's beloved creation. This is precesiley the argument that will be unpacked further in chapter three.

Langland's particular mode of representation is able to do a number of things. First, through Couetyse and the Brewer, the poetry is able to hold open the imaginative

possibility not only of a person, but also of a whole community, that becomes so formed by sin as to reject God and become incapable of contrition: the gift of the Holy Spirit that is necessary for forgiveness.[410] This mode of representation inherits the Augustinian notion of sin as a flood of human custom that in turn cultivates a chain of habit that becomes itself a necessity, and takes this Augustinian account to a frightening Boethian conclusion. Through the sin of Couetyse, the figure of the Brewer and those who mimic the Brewer, Langland imagines sin as capable of eradicating the *imago dei* in a human person and even a society. This raises a question Langland asks of both contemporary England and its church. Is society so deformed and habituated by an engrained flood of human custom that it has become irredeemable? That is to say, is there no longer a way out of this flood of human custom except for a rather Noah-like flood of eradication? How apocalyptic is Langland's imagination?

Another key aspect of Langland's account of sin presents itself as a different sort question. By figuring sin as bound up in social practices and habit formation, and by doing so in such close relation to the material economies that manifest and cultivate sin, *Piers Plowman* is able to keep the imaginative possibility open that if this 'field of folk' are to be saved, then their salvation will include their reformation in a way that involves material practices and habits that relate directly to material economies. Here, Langland is receiving an Anselmian tradition of restitution, and developing it in a way that imagines restitution not only as logically requiring the God-man, but also sees the church as mystically and materially swept up into the processes of restitution. On this, a distinctive view of *Piers Plowman*, Christ makes restitution for human sin, and insofar as the church is mystically Christ's body, the church recalls and enacts this once and for all act of

[410] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* XXII.368-73.

restitution as it participates in forms of corporate Eucharistic life. The Eucharist is also the church's ongoing embodiment, or witness, of Christ's restitution for human sin. That is to say, the church does not merely recall, or remember, the restitution achieved through Christ, but also participates in figuring that restitution to the world as the manifestation of the body of Christ in the world. This heightens the significance of the moment when the turned dreamer/Lyf of passus XXI cries out to Kynde and receives instruction to remain in the church in order to learn how to love. The church renders what is due not only to God through its worship, but renders what is due to God through its material acts of reconciling and making restitution with human others, a distinctively Eucharistic activity which Conscience invites the folk to, but which the people reject in the penultimate passus. The extraordinary theological and social capacity of this image of Eucharistic practice is one of the most significant gifts of Langland's art, and this image is the focus of the next chapter.

Piers Plowman represents sin as a disordered desire for more that is cultivated and reproduced through material processes that manifest themselves in ways that stretch beyond the human imagination's capacity for description. This inverted-transcendent quality of sin, its existence only as non-existence, is precisely the reason that Langland's open, imaginative and agile poetic mode is a most adept form of discourse for theological investigations into sin. That being said, the processes of sin in *Piers Plowman* are not beyond human intelligibility. Rather they are always grounded in material economies. Sin is not merely a moral but also a social issue through and through. Thus, the healing from sin will only come about through corporate participation in practices of restitution that are as divine as they are social, as material as they are spiritual. Langland's unique ability

to resource his inherited traditions through a poetic investigation of sin demonstrates one of the many ways this thesis maintains that his poetry is an extremely fruitful mode of theological discourse.

Chapter 3

'Brethrene of o bloed': Christ and the *corpus mysticum* in *Piers Plowman*

The preceding chapters have demonstrated how Langland's distinctive form of poetry is particularly capable not only of dazzling theological arguments, but more specifically that Langland's art offers an invaluable and too often overlooked contribution to ways in which the church might discern the development of doctrine. This chapter turns explicitly to demonstrate how Langland's poetry offers a significant contribution to the church's practice discerning the development of doctrine, namely the doctrine of the church. The argument of this chapter rests on two general premises which have been implicitly demonstrated through the preceding analysis. The first is that Langland's poetry makes judgments. Sometimes those judgments are subtle, as in the myriad distinctions Langland draws in his nuanced depiction of sin. Sometimes the judgments are scathing, as in the poet's visceral lament of Covetousness and the figure's capacity to deform not only an individual, but indeed a whole society. Whether subtle or direct, Langland's poetry is not merely abstract. *Piers Plowman* makes clear judgments as it unfolds.[411] The second premise is that Langland's poetry employs the elasticity of

[411] Theologians as far back as Irenaeus warned against those who invented heresies by piling one ambiguity upon another and claiming the resulting confusion as the truth veiled in mystery. *Irenée de Lyon: Contre les heresies* [*Adversus haereses*], *Livre 2*, Source chrétiennes 293, 294 (Paris: Cerf, 1982); lib. 2, cap. 10,

'an open line.' Specifically, Langland's lines often invite the audience in multiple directions at the same time. While the poetry does in many cases guide the audience in one direction or another, the openness, the multiplicity of possible directions, Langland opens by way of his form of poetry creates space for multiple possibilities to linger. Thus, even when Langland's poetry makes a judgment, even when it takes the audience in a specific direction, it carries other (abandoned? unexplored? dangerous?) possibilities along. This openness of Langland's lines discourage the audience from forgetting wrong paths, errant teachers, and unrealized hopes. That Langland's poetry offers a contribution to the church's practice of discerning the development of doctrine is grounded in his art's capacity to make judgments while also guiding his audience with an open line that cultivates the virtue of a long full memory.

These paired aspects of Langland's art, a capacity for judgments and openness, are uniquely fitting for examining the church and the praxis the church employs to discern the development of doctrine concerning the church itself. As such, it is necessary to return again to Langland's depiction of the church in order to better appreciate the significance of his poetry as a contribution to the church's capacity to discern its own development. This is because the church's identity is itself not only subtle and complex,

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par. 1, linea 15, 'Omnis autem quaestio non per aliud quod quaeritur habebit resolutionem, neque ambiguitas per aliam ambiguitatem soluetur apud eos qui sensum habent, aut aenigmata per aliud maius aenigma; sed ea quae sunt talia ex manifestis et consonantibus et claris accipiunt absolutiones.' [No question is resolved by another question. Intelligent people do not resolve one ambiguity through another, nor an enigma through a greater one. Such matters find resolutions out of what is evident, consistent, and clear], trans. R. Grant *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 108. Part of my argument concerning the judgments that Langland's poetry makes is to demonstrate the ways in which Langland's poetry employs a mode of dialectic that seeks the truth, in this instance the development of the church's doctrine, through steps (passus) that build upon one another in ways that Irenaeus would appreciate. That certain truth claims of the church are regarded to be paradoxes and/or mysteries (for example, the trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection, etc.) is distinct from the lazy and ultimately vapid form of theology Irenaeus warns against. This is because, such mysteries, for both Langland and Irenaeus, are only discovered through reasoned discourse concerning that which is evident, consistent, and clear. Specifically, a reasoned discourse that follows human language to the limits inherent to creatures' efforts to describe the rationality and truth that is the triune God revealed through Christ.

but also, and especially in the fourteenth century, profoundly contested. Langland's ecclesial vision is not produced under conditions akin to the serenity of a cloistered monastery or a medieval university. Rather, Langland produced, re-imagined, rewrote, and revised his ecclesiology repeatedly over a whole life. Langland's life was one lived under intense intellectual, institutional and social pressures resulting from the Black Death, the Great Schism, the Great Rising of 1381, and the Blackfriars Council of 1382 to name only a few.[412] *Piers Plowman'*s vision of a church collapsing under siege was no whimsical wonder, but rather emerges out of the material conditions under which the poet created his art. As such, *Piers Plowman* offers an ecclesial vision that is no mere luxury, but rather a vision the poet perceived to be most effective to teach and inspire a generation to see both the bleak realities of human life and also the real possibilities of hope God offers through the body of Christ. Consequently, understanding what the church is, or at least what *Piers Plowman* represents the church to be, is fundamental to appreciating the ways Langland's poem contributes to the church discerning the development of its doctrine, a doctrine that includes the church's own self-understanding, and a doctrine which was itself under intense scrutiny in the late fourteenth century.

Tracing Langland's ecclesial vision with attention to the form through which it is imagined requires detailed analysis of four of the most authoritative voices in the poem: Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium,* the Samaritan, and the Christ who harrows hell. The

[412] For a recent analysis of the social and economic impacts of the Black Death in England in the fourteenth century see Alan Kissane, *Civic Community in Late Medieval Lincoln: Urban Society and Economy in the Age of the Black Death, 1289-1409* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017); on the Great Schism see Norman Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades 1305-1378* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Walter Ullmann's *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972), pp. 279-305; on the Great Rising of 1381 see the classic study, Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London: Methuen, 1973) and Steven Justice's *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); and on the Blackfriars Council of 1382 see Andrew Cole's *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

subtle dialectic Langland crafts through these figures interactions, corrections and supersessions outline the content of his ecclesial vision and equip the audience with the resources they need to evaluate Conscience's departure from Vnity at the poem's end. However, before attending to these four figures and the way Langland uses them to depict his ecclesial vision, I offer a brief summary of two of the most influential interpretations of the poem's ecclesiology.

§ Interpretations of Langland's ecclesiology

Two contemporary interpreters, James Simpson and David Aers, have offered perhaps the most influential and detailed analyses of the poem's representation of the church. In his study *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, James Simpson locates *Piers Plowman* within the context of a range of vernacular texts to situate Langland's ecclesiology in a spectrum that ranges from revisionists histories of fourteenth century English Catholicism exemplified by Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of the Alters*, to what Simpson calls the 'evangelical theology of Henrician England' and then expands to include the 'revolutionary spirituality of the sixteenth century.'[413] For Simpson, Langland's poem cannot be neatly categorized within any of these respective points. Rather, Simpson argues,

> *Piers Plowman* was prophetic, looking forward as it did to Reformation theology. Even as it prophesied such a spirituality, however, it also recoiled from it: *Piers Plowman* both foresaw and forestalled the Reformation, by offering a reformation of its own in which grace is distributed in a wholly decentralized way.[414]

[413] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 327-9.
[414] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution,* p. 329.

As such, and in these terms, Simpson argues that Langland's ecclesiology is best described as 'reformist.'

Simpson's interpretation of Langland's 'reformist' ecclesiology is grounded in his interpretation of Langland's 'theology', from whence Simpson argues Langland's 'ecclesiology, economics, and politics' all flow.[415] In short, Simpson argues that Langland's theology affirms that salvation is entirely a matter of the individual's unmediated dependence upon God's gift, independent from ecclesiastical mediation, and yet also recoils from this revolutionary view. Specifically, Simpson argues that Langland's theology decentralizes grace from any view suggesting grace to be a mechanistic distributive power channeled through the institutional church to the faithful.[416] Yet, Simpson also demonstrates ways in which the poem rejects a theology of 'grace alone', as if the institution of the church played no causal role *at all* in the journey of salvation. For Simpson, Langland offers a reformist spirituality in which grace is not constrained to the semi-pelagian debates of the fourteenth century, but is instead best understood as a sort of psychoanalytic drama. The church has a role to play, but not as an institution that either controls the distribution of grace through the sacraments, nor as an institution that rewards good works with God's grace. As Simpson explains, 'Instead, the Church is given a psychological, volitional location. … In Langland's poem, … Christ's

[415] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution,* pp. 344-5.
[416] Such arguments were present among various late-medieval figures, particular in the critiques John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham raised against what they perceived to be an overly mechanistic view of grace depicted by Thomas Aquinas in his sacramental theology. For an overview of this debate, see Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price (London: SCM Press, 2006).

best act is to allow individuals to merit salvation through penance.'[417] Simpson summarizes Langland's theology of grace and salvation this way:

> Salvation is ultimately dependent upon Christ's freely given act of Atonement, but immediately dependent on the choice of individual Christians. … The sacraments, and especially the sacrament of penance, are not merely signs of prior decisions in this institution; on the contrary, they are functional practices of negotiating with God. … For the individual Christian, history remains open to individual effort, and is not wholly subject to the inscrutable movements of grace.[418]

This theology, Simpson argues, is best described as a reformist spirituality that results in a reformist ecclesiology. The church is not to be utterly abandoned under the banner of certain (later) protestant renderings of salvation 'by grace alone' which eventually undermine the role of the church in the Christian life. The church, as Simpson interprets Langland's vision, plays an indispensible role in God's decentralized distribution of grace in the pilgrim's psychoanalytic journey of understanding how a Christian might merit salvation in the light of Christ's atonement by participating in the ongoing sacrament of penance. For Simpson, Langland's poem offers a significant theological reform of contemporary semi-pelagian debates of grace. Grace is neither earned through works, nor conferred inscrutably regardless of human action. Rather God's grace is conferred in a thoroughly decentralized mode and realized through pilgrims' ongoing participation in the sacrament of penance. From this theological center, Simpson argues that Langland envisions a reformist spirituality that will in turn reform the church. The church will

[417] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 361.
[418] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 362.

remain a critical element of the Christian life without wielding dominion as the gate-keeper of God's gift of grace.

Certain tensions and questions arise in Simpson's analysis. Specifically, one might ask, is Simpson's portrayal of Langland's theology of grace coherent and is it consistent with that offered by the poem? In terms of coherence, does Simpson's suggestion that Langland's view of salvation 'is *ultimately* dependent upon Christ's freely given act of Atonement, but *immediately dependent* on the choice of individual Christians' risk contradiction? Is salvation contingent upon God's saving act in Christ, or the volitional act of individual pilgrims? Here, Simpson's portrayal of Langland's theology of grace does not reform the semi-pelagian debates of the fourteenth century, but rather reproduces it in a different mode.[419] The extent to which Simpson's interpretation of Langland's view of grace is consistent with grace's representation in *Piers Plowman* will be taken up in detail below.

Prior to this analysis, however, David Aers' rigorous career-long investigation of *Piers Plowman* must be considered not least because he offers a substantive alternative to Simpson's interpretation. In his recent essay, *Beyond Reformation*, Aers pays particular attention to fourteenth century ecclesial forms and doctrinal developments around the papacy, as well as figures like William of Ockham who opposed such developments, to

[419] See Rega Wood, 'Introduction' in her *Ockham on the Virtues* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Perdue University Press, 1997), pp. 3-59. For an example of a particular voice in late medieval semi-Pelagian debates see Gabriel Biel, *Canonis missae expositio,* ed. H.A. Oberman and W.J. Courtenay (Mainz, 1965), Lect. LIX P, 2: 443 and especially Beil's 'The Circumcision of the Lord' wherein Biel frames human and divine agency in a way that became abundantly popular among the *via moderna*. Beil argues that grace strengthens human power. He offers the image of a bird that has a stone tied to it so that it cannot fly and notes that if the bird's wings were strengthened, then one would say that the impediment to flight had been lessened, although the weight of the stone had not been lessened. Beil's framing of grace as strengthening *human power*, as the strengthening of the *bird's wings*, frames grace as an extrinsic power that is added to the pre-existing power of human agency. Langland, I will show, turns this on its head, making grace more instrinsic to humanity than humanity's own agency. See especially the analysis of *Liberum Arbitrium's* image of the Tree of Charity below.

demonstrate ways in which Langland imagines the historical community of the church to be capable of such inversion that the church itself can become an engine for what John Paul II calls de-Christianization.[420] Aers describes such de-Christianization, quoting John Paul II,

> …a decline or obscuring of the moral sense. This comes about both as a result of a loss of awareness of the originality of Gospel morality and as a result of an eclipse of fundamental principles and ethical values themselves.[421]

For Aers, this is precisely the fear voiced by *Liberium Arbitruim,* so vividly depicted by figures like Covetousness, the Brewer and the break down of Vnity at the poem's end.[422] Aers' analysis highlights the judgments Langland's poetry makes through its depiction of the gap between the brief glimpse of a visionary Church in the figure of Lady Church in Passus I, and the historical community that fails to live up to its own visionary identity at the poem's end.[423] Aers emphatically insists that, 'Nowhere does Langland make explicit how he understands the relationship between the visionary Church descending from heaven to teach him and the historical Church which fills the poem.'[424] Aers' analysis does not reduce Langland to any sort of Wycliffite or proto-Reformer, nor does Aers locate Langland within the company of those sixteenth century revolutionaries Simpson describes.[425] For Aers, like Simpson, Langland is not anti-institutional, nor does Langland uphold any commitment to grace being utterly unmediated. Rather, Aers'

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[420] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 84.
[421] *Ibid.*
[422] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.242-7, As holiness and honestee out of holy churche / Spryngeth and spredeth and enspireth the peple / Thorw parfit preesthoed and prelates of holy churche, / Riht so oute of holy churche al euel spredeth / There inparfit preestboed is, prechares and techares.
[423] See Aers 'What Is Charity? William Langland's Answers with Some Diachronic Questions', *Religions*, 31 (2019), pp. 1-12, at p. 2.
[424] *Ibid*.
[425] David Aers, *Faith, Ethics, and church: writing in England, 1360-1409* (New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

research argues that Langland depicts grace as a gift composed of a sort of double agency that includes both God and humanity.[426] This has specific implications for Langland's ecclesiology.

For Aers, *Piers Plowman* does not offer a reformist view of penance as a psychoanalytic practice to understand or accept God's gift of grace, but rather offers a poetry that gestures towards the mysterious elisions and overlaps of God's grace and human agency whereby a person is called by God from within to return to the very God their soul calls to in prayer.[427] Aers couples this distinct interpretation of Langland's theology of grace with a robust attention to the poem's representation of human beings as powerfully susceptible to the practices and institutions that conform them into both virtues and vices.[428] The habituation of the will is always embedded in webs of institutions, language, practices, and communities. And yet Aers' attention to Langland's representation of the corruptibility of the church, performed in dialogue with fourteenth century theologians like William of Ockham and the historical realities of the Great Schism, leads Aers to an interpretation of Langland's ecclesiology he describes as congregationalist.[429]

For Aers, Langland's poetry affirms the role of the church in the Christian life as inextricably wrapped up in God's mysterious gifting of grace. Aers delicately traces the

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[426] David Aers, 'Augustinian Prelude: Conversion and Agency' in *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth Century Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind: Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 1-24.
[427] *Ibid*.
[428] For Aers' study of the virtues and vices in *Piers Plowman* see his 'Langland on the Church and the End of the Cardinal Virtues', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42 (2012), pp. 59-81. For Aers' analysis of the practices, sacraments and institutions that conform figures in *Piers Plowman,* and more broadly in fourteenth-century English writing, see his *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind: Notre Dame Press, 2004).
[429] Aers argues in both 'Langland on the Church and the End of the Cardinal Virtues' and *Beyond Reformation: An Essay on William Langland's* Piers Plowman *and the End of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame, Ind: Notre Dame University Press, 2014) that Langland's ecclesiology is best described as congregationalist.

ways in which Langland portrays Will's formation as being wrapped up in the influences, teaching, language, and institutions as wide and complex as the 'maze of the world.' Will is dependent on and determined by the context, communities and histories within which he finds himself inescapably embedded. And yet, on Aers' interpretation of the poem, the susceptibility of all human wills to lusts for power and dominion leave open the possibility that historical institutions bearing the name church might turn out to be its opposite. As such, Aers reads Langland's poem as both a guide and an exhortation for pilgrims to discern, discover and participate in communities of fools ('foles') who might rightly form them in charity whilst wandering through the maze of a world and a late-medieval Catholic Church, besieged and seduced by the false church of anti-christ.[430]

While Aers' interpretation certainly incorporates multiple elements of Langland's indebtedness to a variety of strands in Catholic thought, both Aers and Simpson ascribe distinct protestant sensibilities to *Piers Plowman.* Each in their own way argue that Langland depicts the church as important, but not itself a sacrament, not itself a cause of grace.[431] For Simpson, Langland decentralizes grace, rejects a theology of grace alone, and yet affirms penance as well as the institution through which penance is practiced as necessary along a psychoanalytic process of acceptance. As suggested above, Simpson's account of Langland's theology of grace reproduces rather than reforms fourteenth century semi-pelagian debates, and situates itself within a contradiction regarding the relationship between human and divine agency that will plague protestant renderings of grace for centuries. Specifically, circumscribing the depiction of grace within the

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[430] Aers has particular examples in mind including Hawisia Moon (*Beyond Reformation*), Walter Brut (*Sanctifying Signs*), Margary Kemp (*Beyond Reformation*).

[431] In contrast, Thomas Aquinas depicts the Eucharist, and thus the Church who distributes the Eucharist, as a cause of grace. See especially, Aquinas, ST IIIa q.74-81, especially IIIa q.79. See also his *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book IV.61.

assumption that human and divine agency are necessarily competitive and thereby displace one another such that salvation must ultimately hinge upon *either* the will of God *or* the will of a person. Under such assumptions, the church is either irrelevant or perhaps a compliment to the Christian life, but certainly does not play a necessary or causal role in salvation. While Simpson works to suggest otherwise, one can almost feel the necessity of the church in the Christian life slipping through Simpson's hands, as it is ultimately reduced to a role that is important, but not fundamental; complimentary but not instrumental.

For Aers, the necessity of the church is questioned in another way. The church is necessary, but nowhere to be found. The search for the church as a recognizable historical and hierarchical institution capable of forming the will in charity does not exist as such in the poem, as Aers aruges, 'Nowhere does Langland make explicit how he understands the relationship between the visionary Church descending from heaven to teach him and the historical Church which fills the poem.'[432] For Aers, *Piers Plowman* offers a sustained lament and indictment of the contemporary church as pervaded by Mede in such a way that the modern church is revealed to be a parodic simulacrum of the celestial figure of Lady Church from Passus I.[433] Aers argues that Langland's ecclesiology does not reject the church or the church's role in the Christian life, but rather that Langland's poetry critiques those forms of ecclesiology that collapse the mystery of the church into a historical, hierarchical and landed institution. Instead, for Aers, Langland's ecclesiology

[432] Aers, 'What Is Charity?', p. 2.
[433] Aers, *Beyond Reformation,* p. 168, and especially at 171, 'The latter [the church as depicted in Passus XXI.335 through XXII.379] represents the contemporary Roman Church as a demonic simulacrum of the Pentacostal church of the Holy Spirit and Piers. It *obstructs* the visions of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. It *dissolves* the memory of doctrine taught so carefully by Christ the Samaritan and Christ the emancipatory orator in hell. It infuses Christians living in the Roman Church and obeying its mandatory sacrament of penance with an overwhelming opiate.'

is congregationalist, pointing towards those individuals and communities of fools ('foles') called forth at Pentecost and led by the Holy Spirit across time. Simply put, 'Langland leaves us with the church of a few fools.'[434] Aers' own description is instructive and worth citing at length:

> In fact, disciples of Christ are found in all sorts of places and vocations. Agricultural laborers like Piers the Plowman (Prol. 22-24; VII.182-282); anchorites and hermits 'that holdeth hem in here [their] selles' (Prol. 27-32); people scattered among poor and rich, even once, in a distant past, a friar and, once upon a time, kings and cardinals, according to Liberum Arbitrium (XVI.340-74a). These all foreshadow the fools of the poem's ending, and all seem to practice discipleship in a manner independent of any ecclesiastical hierarchy directing their spiritual life, let alone any identifiable magisterium deploying a legitimate coercive jurisdiction replete with worldly power.
>
> While Langland discerns Christian discipleship in such individuals and groups, he also implies that individual spiritual disciplines, active and contemplative, guided by the Holy Spirit, may lead to the making of a church in the Christian's heart.[435]

Aers then interprets the poem's depiction of Conscience's departure from the crumbling Roman Church Vnity in the final two passus as Conscience 'abandoning the modern church led by pope (or popes, in the present Schism) and cardinals, searching for the absent Piers, and crying out to the Holy Spirit' to join the church of 'foles [fools].'[436]

Yet, as a Catholic Christian shaped by the medieval assumption that *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* popularized by Pope Boniface VIII's *Unam sanctam* (1302), how

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[434] Aers, *Beyond Reformation,* p. 171.
[435] Aers, *Beyond Reformation,* p. 169.
[436] Aers, *Beyond Reformation,* p. 171.

would Langland imagine the absence of the very institution perceived to be necessary for his salvation? Furthermore, given Langland's sustained attention to the malleability of both Conscience and Will, what judgments may lie latent within Langland's unique poetic form concerning Conscience's departure from the church in the closing lines? After all, Augustine's view that there can never be a valid reason for separating one's-self from the church was certainly not unknown to Langland.[437] Recalling Aquinas' powerful argument outlined in Chapter 1, how is Conscience's willingness to abandon the church in favor of his own private judgment not equivalent to the root of heresy, the pride that chooses one's own discernment over and against the discernment of the community God has promised to guide through the Holy Spirit until Christ comes again? Lastly, given the fragility and fractile nature of both Conscience and Will's own self-knowing depicted time and again throughout the poem, how could Langland envision an individual pilgrim (like Conscience) being capable of trusting their own judgment in the journey outside of the church? How might Conscience, as an individual pilgrim, be capable of discerning between the guidance of the Holy Spirit to whom he calls, and himself? How might Conscience be able to trust his own discernment between those virtuous fools Aers celebrates, and actual fools (like Recklessness) who would lead him into disaster?

In his analysis of Langland's theology of both the Eucharist and the church, Aers argues powerfully that Langland's poetry resists the temptation to collapse a sign into the signifier.[438] Yet, given Aers' subtle attention to Langland's ability to depict grace as bound up in the elisions and overlaps of human and divine agency, might Langland's

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[437] Augustine, *Contra epistulam Parmeniani*, PL 43, 105-105, bk 3, chapter 5, no 28.
[438] See especially his 'The Sacrament of the Alter in *Piers Plowman*' in *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2004) and *Beyond Reformation.*

poetry also render the Eucharist and the church in forms that reflect similar analogous elisions of God's mystical presence through material forms? If so, might Langland's poetic representation of the church include similar elisions and overlaps of human and divine agency *within* the historical and material institution of the late-medieval church in England? And if so, might Langland's representation offer an example of how the church might engage in the processes of its own discernment while simultaneously taking into account the church's failures? These are the questions this chapter aims to explore. But first, I want to clarify, or at least offer more specific content to, this sense that the church could be depicted as a historical and material institution that includes and in fact requires descriptive attention to the elisions and overlaps of human and divine agency particular to the church itself.

§ Stretching the ecclesial imagination

Henri de Lubac's classic study *Corpus Mysticum* traces key shifts in Catholic ecclesiology and Eucharistic theology from the patristic era through the middle ages. His *The Splendor of the Church* – written almost a decade later, and less for an academic audience and more for fellow priests – draws on de Lubac's extensive learning to cast an ecclesial vision soaked in the wisdom of the church. Read together, these two works offer an important lens into the tradition(s), theological developments and ecclesial vision(s) that echo deeply throughout Langland's poetry. I would like to suggest that de Lubac's work in these two texts offers a third lens through which to consider Langland's own ecclesial vision beyond those proposed by Simpson and Aers.

Corpus Mysticum traces what de Lubac describes as a process through which 'the word *true* supplanted the word *mystical* as a description for the sacramental body [of the Eucharist]' in the period between the patristic era and the Late Middle ages.[439] De Lubac begins by excavating a widespread patristic vision of the Church, the Eucharist and Christ's body as mystically united. For figures like Augustine, this overlapping and interconnecting vision was often refered to in various forms of shorthand, including Augustine's frequent reference, *totus christus.* As will be demonstrated in further detail below, *totus Christus,* for Augustine, stands as a sort of shorthand pointing symbolically towards the mystery whereby Christ, Christ's body the Church and Christ's body upon the altar are united as all creation's ultimate end, even as they are simultaneously effecting the transformation of God's beloved, the bread and the wine and indeed all creation into Christ's body.

De Lubac demonstrates the ways in which 'mystery' and 'sacrament' were used as virtual synonyms by patristic thinkers, and that thinkers like Augustine consistently linked the Church, the Eucharist and Christ in such a way that all were understood to be interconnected – often overlapping – insofar as grace itself includes the work of God to bind together the Church and all creation into Christ's body through the mystery of the sacrament. One of a myriad of examples includes de Lubac quoting Augustine's *Confessions,* 'You will not change me into you, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you will be changed into me.'[440] For de Lubac, this mystical vision of unity emerges from the overlapping and interconnected grace at work through the sacrament of

[439] Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* trans. Gemma Simmonds (SCM Press, 2006), p. 248.
[440] *Ibid,* p. 178.

the Eucharist, the Church that receives it, and Christ's body. This vision is developed further by later figures like Gerhoh of Reichersberg,

> The entire Christ is eaten in the mystery of the altar. The eater does not change him into himself, that is, into food for his flesh; but he himself will be changed into him, so as to become a member of his body which is the one Church, redeemed and fed by the one body of Christ.[441]

Thus, de Lubac illustrates a patristic and Augustinian tradition that readily links past, present and future together in and through a multi-fold understanding of the sacrament of Christ's body the Church, the body of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and the sacrament of Christ's body present upon the altar. For de Lubac, this vision of the mystical includes a vision of time, body, Christ, the elements, and the Church bound together through a sacramental imagination replete with overlaps and unions which transcend clear distinction. De Lubac writes,

> Fundamentally, they [the distinction between the Church and the Eucharist in patristic usage] are not so much used to describe two successive objects as two simultaneous things that make one whole. For the body of Christ that is the Church is in no *other* than the body and the blood of the mystery. … Through the Eucharist each person is truly placed within the one body. It unites all the members of it among themselves, as it unites them to their one head. … In this way, little by little, the 'whole Christ' comes into being, who is always in our minds as the ultimate end of the mystery. So much so that, in this perspective of

[441] *Ibid,* p. 180.

> totality and of unity, there is virtually no need to search for formulations or expressions to distinguish one 'body' from another.[442]

For de Lubac, this patristic and Augustinian vision demonstrates little interest in parsing out the location of Christ's 'true' body, and was instead seriously and playfully committed to seeing the Christian life as a journey of God's beloved being swept up into the mystery of grace through the church and the sacrament of the Eucharist towards the ultimate end whereby all bodies are made one body in Christ and Christ is 'all in all.'[443]

De Lubac then shifts his attention to narrate the way in which this patristic and Augustinian vision of the mystical body of Christ is gradually abandoned in the wake of the Berengar controversy and consequent developments in theological method in the late Middle Ages.[444]

De Lubac describes Berengar as a representative of a 'new mentality that was spreading, a new order of problem that was emerging and catching people's interest, a new way of thinking, the formulation of new categories.'[445] For de Lubac, these categories were drawn from and influenced by the recovery of Aristotle in figures like Thomas Aquinas, and this new way of thinking was the emergence of a dialectical theology fueled by the rise of medieval schools and a renewed furvor to draw theological distinctions in order to avoid the confusion of categories which would lead to theological error. Yet, for de Lubac, the dialectitions' passion for distinction deeply wounded the symbolism in which the faith of Augustine and other patristics imagined the mystical

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[442] *Ibid,* p. 23.
[443] *Ibid,* p. 177-179.
[444] *Ibid,* p. 80, 'Little by little, however, this same word *body,* in its accepted Eucharistic sense, would come to impose itself, thereby supplanting more complex formulations, such as '*sacrament of the body*' or '*mystery of the body'* which had been so common up to then. The watershed, as we will see further on, must be situated in the years immediately following on from the scandal caused by Berengar.'
[445] *Ibid,* p. 228.

interconnection between Christ's body the Church, Jesus Christ of Nazareth and Christ's body upon the alter. De Lubac narrates the long process through which 'mystical' language traditionally used to speak the mystery of this sacramental unity between the sacrament of Christ, the Eucharist and the Church, was supplanted in exchange for the language of 'true.' For de Lubac, the dialectictians' innitial effort to theologically unpack the doctrine of transubstantiation became the altar upon which the mystical sacramental vision of Augustine was sacrificed in order to defend against Berengar's heresey.[446]

In short, de Lubac argues that in its fervor to affirm the doctrine of transubstantiation and defend against heresy the late medieval church depended upon a form of dialectical theology that gutted the patristic vision that held Christ, the Eucharist and the Church together under the mystery of the sacrament. Preferring instead the language of Christ's 'true' presence in the bread and the wine, the late medieval church drifted away from the mystical affirmation that the sacrament includes the grace through which God unites the Church, the Eucharist and the recipient into the one body of Christ in a way that transcends both time and space. As de Lubac laments,

> At the hands of Berengar, the sacramental synthesis disintegrated, as once the Trinitatian and Christological synthesis had done at the hands of the Arians and their successors. … If others were tempted to an excessive confusion of Christ with his Church, the Head with the members of the Body, for his part Berengar, entirely on the other side, no longer had any sense at all of their mutual

[446] *Ibid,* p. 228, 'Its [Augustine's vision] roots were slowly gnawed away by the analysis with which it necessarily had to collude to an ever-greater degree. Its sap was slowly drying up. It continued to spread on the surface, but its deepest life force was passing on elsewhere.'

> immanence. His dialectic prevented him from understanding Augustine's 'one Christ, full Christ, total Christ [*totus christus*], whole Christ.'[447]

The abandonment of this sacramental synthesis in favor of dialectical specificity not only led to the abandonment to the mystical sense of the patristic vision. It also created a distinction between the church itself and the Eucharist. Where previously the two were mystically bound together in the sacrament of Christ's body, now through the distinctions popularized by medieval dialectictions, Christ is 'truly' present in the bread and the wine, but not 'truly' present in the church in the same way. Augustine imagined Christ's body on the altar as mystically united with the people of the church who were themselves being swept up into Christ's very body through their reception of Christ's body in the sacrament. For de Lubac, the wedge introducted by late medieval dialectical theology creates a world in which Christ's 'true' body is limited to the bread and the wine, and the faithful are no longer invited to imagine, to recognize, the ways in which grace is God's activity of binding God's beloved together in unity with Christ's body through the sacrament of the Church and the Eucharist.[448]

Piers Plowman engages the theological shifts from mystical to diaclectical theology de Lubac narrates. Furthermore, Langland's unique poetic form of theological discourse offers an alternative in both form and content to contemporary late medieval ecclesiology that intentionally or unintentionally drove a wedge between Christ's body on the altar and Christ's body the church. As I will argue further below, Langland's poetic mode of theological inquiry offers a unique form of discourse that creates space

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[447] *Ibid,* p. 226.
[448] *Ibid*, p. 246, 'The ultimate reality of the sacrament, what was once upon a time its reality and truth *par excellence,* was thus expelled from the sacrament itself. … Once again, is this a minor detail in wording? No doubt it is. But this minor detail is the sign of an important fact. At the same time that it was being thrown out of the *true Body*, the Church was beginning to be thrown out of the *mystery of faith*.'

for both rigorous distinction *and also* the holding together of those distinctions in ways that reflects the patristic tradition's commitment to the mystery of the sacrament and the church. First, however, I turn to de Lubac's later, more pastoral and constructive ecclesial vision as offered through *The Splendor of the Church.* This vision, drawing deeply on the tradition de Lubac works to recover in *Corpus Mysticum* is, I will argue, a helpful lens through which to read Langland's own ecclesiology.

De Lubac's *Splendor of the Church* is pertinent to this study of Langland's ecclesiology insofar as de Lubac draws his ecclesial vision from a myriad of patristic and medieval sources, sources that would have inspired Langland's own imagination. Key elements of de Lubac's vision demonstrate ways in which ancient and medieval thinkers open up vistas to imagine the church in ways that not only resonate deeply with the vision of *Piers Plowman,* but also offer important nuance pertaining to how de Lubac – and Langland – recover a patristic sacramental synthesis of *totus christus.*

De Lubac writes,

> The Church is a mystery; that is to say that she is also a sacrament….She is 'the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments', and she is herself the greatest sacrament that contains and vitalizes all the others. In this world she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ himself, in his humanity, is for us the sacrament of God.[449]

For de Lubac, that which is sacramental is the sensible bond between two worlds and has a twofold characteristic. On the one hand, the church is a sign of something else and thus is not to be confused as an end in itself. On the other, as a sacramental reality it can never

[449] Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* trans. Michael Mason (Ignatius Press, 1956), p. 202.

be discarded as merely a sign. For de Lubac the church is a necessary yet 'translucent medium',

> We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bonds cannot be broken.[450]

What does the sign and sacrament of the church signify? For de Lubac,

> Her whole end is to show us Christ, lead us to him, and communicate his grace to us; to put it in a nutshell, she exists solely to put us into relation with him. She alone can do that, and it is a task she never completes; there will never come a moment, either in the life of the individual or in the life of the race, in which her role ought to come to an end or even could come to an end. If the world lost the Church, it would lose the Redemption too.[451]

The church is not an end in itself, according to de Lubac, but a sign pointing beyond itself to Christ. Yet, the church is also a sacramental sign which can never be discarded, a sacramental sign which never completes the work of presenting Christ and communicating grace. De Lubac then goes a step farther suggesting that, 'The Church is the sacrament of Christ. This means, to put it another way, that there is between her and him a certain relation of mystical unity.'[452] A mystical unity such that, 'Practically

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[450] *Ibid*., p. 203.
[451] *Ibid*.
[452] *Ibid*., p. 209.

speaking, for each one of us Christ is thus his Church.'[453] It is here that de Lubac's description of the church as a sacrament gestures towards certain overlaps and elisions between God and the material form of the institutional church through which God communicates God's-self to creation. 'Christ is thus his Church.' Christ cannot be separated from the historic and material community of those who worship him.

Is de Lubac here collapsing the sign into the signifier in ways that Aers argues *Piers Plowman* resists? De Lubac is not entirely dismissive of the imperfections of the church along her earthly pilgrimage and is indeed sensitive to the ways Christians err when the church is perceived to be an end in itself.[454] However, de Lubac insists that too much attention to the church itself runs the risk of letting 'our vision of the Church stop short at the Church' rather than moving through that translucent medium into mystical union with God in Christ.[455] Here, de Lubac's ecclesiology is not reducible to pietism, but is instead grounded in the ways that living in and through the church are constitutive of a person's participation in and union with Christ.[456] Put another way, his ecclesial vision offered in *The Splendor of the Church* is an attempt to recover the patristic mystical vision of the church as a sacrament that is always already bound up with Christ's body even as it shares in God's grace which is actively sweeping God's beloved into Christ's body through the church and the Eucharist. Furthermore, de Lubac suggestion that the church is a sort of 'translucent medium' offers an important hedge, or nuance, for interpretors who might otherswise be tempted to read *totus christus* literally

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[453] *Ibid*., p. 210. See his *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price (London: SCM Press, 2006).
[454] De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church,* pp. 218-9.
[455] *Ibid*., p. 224.
[456] *Ibid*., p. 228, 'The Gospel is not announced by word only. It is announced – and to an even greater extent – by living.'

rather than symbolically. That is to say, de Lubac's description of the church (which also applys more broadly sacramentally) is that neither the sacrament of the Church or the Eucharist are ends in themselves; but rather these are means of grace God offers through which God actively sweeps God's beloved into Christ's very body. And this because de Lubac is committed to a faith that believes,

> Men may be lacking in the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit will never be lacking to the Church. In virtue of her witness and sovereign powers, she will always be the Sacrament of Christ and make him really and truly present to us.[457]

This particular commitment to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, and de Lubac's representation of the church as a 'translucent medium' – a mystery and a sacrament through which God is reweaving God's beloved into union with one another and God through a multi-fold vision of the body of Christ (on the altar *and* as the church) – may at first glance seem foreign to the representations Langland offers of the church's unraveling and Conscience's ultimate departure from it in *Piers Plowman*. However, while Conscience leaves the Church at the poem's end, another figure remains within it. Commanded by Kynde, Will is told to remain in Holy Church, even as it crumbles from within, because it is only within the Church that Kynde tells Will he can learn to love.[458] What do the poem's interpreters make of this juxtaposition? How might closer attention to the structure of Langland's poetry, and the way it leads to this specific moment, offer an alternative representation of the church to the models described by Aers and Simpson above? It is to these questions, and to Langland's poem, that I now turn.

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[457] *Ibid*., p, 235.
[458] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.204-12.

§ The blood of Christ as the church's foundation

'Ayeynes thy graynes,' quod Grace, 'bigynneth for to ripe,
Ordeyne the an hous, Peres, to herborwe in thy cornes.'
'By god! Grace,' quod Peres, 'ye moet gyue tymber
And ordeyne that hous ar ye hennes wende.'
And Grace gaf hym the cros with croune of thornes
That Crist vpon Caluary for mankynde on peyned;
And of his bapteme and bloed that he bledde on rode
He made a manere morter and mercy hit hihte.
And therwith Grace bigan to make a goode foundement
And wateled hit and walled hit with his paynes and his passioun
And of all holy writ he made a roef after
And calde that hous Vnite, Holy Chirche an Englisch.[459]

This remarkable exchange between Grace and Piers, Grace who is the Holy Spirit the third person of the Trinity, depicts in vivid imaginative detail the founding of the church God establishes through Pentecost. This is Langland's account of the church's beginning. It is a church not only established by God's own self, the Holy Spirit, but also founded upon Christ's passion. The very baptism and blood of Christ poured out on the cross becomes the mortar with which Grace lays the foundation, while Christ's blood also becomes the very material with which the walls are wattled. This vivid depiction of the

[459] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.320-329, ['When it's time your grains,' said Grace, 'begin to ripen, / Ordain yourself a house, Piers, to store your harvest in.' / 'By God! Grace,' said Piers, 'you must give timber / And ordain that house before you go away. – And Grace gave him the cross with the crown of thorns / That Christ suffered on for mankind on Calvary; / And of his baptism and blood that he bled on cross / He made a kind of mortar, and called it mercy. / And with that Grace began to lay a good foundation / And wattled it and walled it with his pain and his passion / And of all Holy Writ he made a roof after / And called that house Unity, Holy Church in English].

Church built upon and held together by Christ's blood is not a repetition of those forms of late-medieval piety that offer particular reverence to Christ's physical suffering, nor is the reference to Christ's 'blood' empty religiosity.[460] Langland's depiction of Christ's passion being the literal foundation of the Church participates in a long process of discernment that the poem has been engaged in concerning election, the boundaries of Christ's atonement and the nature of the church. The importance that the Church be founded upon Christ's 'blood' and how Christ's passion and blood are related to the poem's depiction of the atonement, are critical features. So too are the implications of the poem's representation of Christ's atonement and consequent establishment of the Church's foundation upon Christ's blood for the constitution and identity of the Church.

Another element of this scene invites consideration in a distinct, though related, direction. The church Grace establishes in Christ's blood is not, perhaps surprisingly, the pristine church of Acts or antiquity which inspires some elements of *Liberum Arbitruim's* ecclesial vision.[461] Rather, Grace establishes the very church founded in Christ's passion and then connects it immediately to the historic community of the church in England,

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[460] See, for example, David Aers 'The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Orthodox Late Medieval Representations' in David Aers and Lynn Staley, *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) pp. 15-42. See also Miri Rubin *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Caroline Walker Bynum *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

[461] I am here referring to that strand of Wycliffite ecclesiology (later popularized through the Reformation) that imagined the church in its first three hundred years prior to Constantine's donation to be a more pure and holy embodiment than the forms the church takes following Constantine's donation. *Liberum Arbitrium* signals this view specifically calling Constantine's donation 'venym [venom] / And tho that haen Petres power aren apoysened [poisoned] alle' (XVII.220), and further calls upon kings to forcibly take the lands and endowment which Constantine gave to the church, described as venom/poison (XVII.227-232): Taketh here londes, ye lords, and lat hem lyue by dymes / Yf the kynges coueyte in Cristes pees to lyuene. / For if possession be poysen and inparfit hem make, / The heuedes of holy churche and tho that ben vnder hem, / Hit were charite to deschargen hem for holy churche sake / And purge hem of the olde poysen ar more perel falle. [Take their lands, you lords, and let them live by tithes / If the kings desire to live in Christ's peace. / For if possession is poison and makes them imperfect, / The heads and their subordinates of Holy Church, / It would be charity to relieve them for Holy Church's sake / And purge them of the old poison before the peril grows].

'Vnite, Holy Chirche an Englisch.' Here, Langland connects the miraculous Pentecostal founding of Christ's church through the Holy Spirit not with any imagined pristine Jerusalem community a millennia earlier. Rather, Langland jumps chronologically from the founding of the church in Acts, to invite a direct connection between that miraculous joining of the Holy Spirit and the early church to the historically identifiable fourteenth century church in England. At first glance, this moment appears to undermine Aers' conviction that, 'Nowhere does Langland make explicit how he understands the relationship between the visionary Church descending from heaven to teach him and the historical Church which fills the poem.'[462] For, in this exchange between Grace and Piers, Langland seems to be drawing an explicit connection between the church in England and the church Grace establishes through the blood of Christ's passion. Whether this is or is not the case, however, requires a careful deliberate tracing of the poem's structure which led to this moment, a structure which reveals the implications of this scene and its vivid depiction of the church as founded on Christ's blood. To do so requires attention to the specific teachers and instruction Will receives leading up this moment. It is through those various teachers and the dialectical unfolding of their distinct positions that Langland prepares the audience to understand the significance of the particular foundation Grace lays the church upon, and how the atonement won through the blood of Christ stands as the very foundation of the church.

Several key moments shape Will's pilgrimage and, in turn, Langland's argument. Langland's vision of the Church cannot be expressed without the memory and eventual correction of Recklessness' teaching in Passus XI-XII. This correction requires multiple teachers in the poem. First, however, a brief recollection of some of the key moments of

[462] Aers, 'What Is Charity?', p. 2.

Will's journey, and then more detailed analysis of Recklessness' representation of grace, election and the implications they have for Recklessness' ecclesiology will make those teachers and visions which ultimately supersede Recklessness' view more apparent.

§ Following Will to, and from, church

In many ways, Will's journey begins with his initial call to Lady Church in Passus I, a plea that she might, 'Teche me to no tresor but telle me this ilke, / How Y may sauve my soule, that saynt art yholde.'[463] Yet, Will's desires are subsequently ravished not by the beatific vision as the hope of salvation, but instead by the gilded Lady Mede and the politics of courtly life. As Will follows various figures angling for power at court, he awakens and finds himself wandering about until he falls back into another dream where he beholds the confessions of the seven deadly sins before Repentance.[464] This sequence appears as an imagined confession by all those vices of lust, covetousness, pride, envy, sloth, gluttony and wrath that Will witnesses in the maze of the world and which he beholds corrupting the king's court. Will is subsequently swept up into this confession alongside the seven deadly sins as, 'A thousend of men tho throngen togyderes, / Criede vpward to Crist and to his clene moder / To haue grace to go to Treuthe – god leue that they mote!'[465] Will and the folk then set out leaderless for Truth, 'Ac ther ne was wye non so wys that the way thider couthe / But blostrede forth as bestes ouer baches and hulles …'[466] As they blunder, the folk encounter Piers the Plowman who claims to know

[463] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, I.79-80, ['Teach me no more of treasure, but tell me this, / Sainted lady, how may I save my soul'].
[464] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V-VII.
[465] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VII.155-7, [A thousand men then thronged together, / Cried upward to Christ and to his clean mother / To have grace to go to truth – God grant that they might!].
[466] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VII.158-159, [But there was no one so wise that he knew the way there, / But blundered forth like beasts over valleys and hills…].

the way to Truth, and yet first invites the people to work together in an attempt to establish an agrarian utopia.[467] The attempt fails. While some folk work earnestly together, other 'wasters' chew up that which is honestly won. This eventually leads to the granting of Truth's pardon to Piers on behalf of the people.[468] However, the pardon is but two lines from the Athanasian Creed, 'Qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eteram; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum' which a priest interprets and declares,

> Y kan no pardon fynde
> Bote Dowel and haue wel and god shal haue thy soule
> And do yuele and haue euele and hope thow non othere
> Bote he that euele lyueth euele shal ende.[469]

The beginning of Passus X finds Will 'for to seke Dowel [in search of Dowell].' That is to say, Will's journey is now a pilgrimage to discover how he might 'do well' and thereby merit salvation. It is worth noting that Will's first exchange with Lady Church in Passus I, and Will's beginning again in Passus X, are both attempts made by Will to save himself, either through a 'kynde' knowing (I.78) or by 'dowel' (X.2ff.). This is worth noting because the first half of the poem represents Will's search for salvation as centered in his own agency, as he says, 'How Y may sauve my soule.'[470] Will assumes that he can save himself through right knowledge or right action, and his search for Dowell is merely a maturation or development of his assumptions regarding the capacity of human agency to merit salvation.

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[467] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VII.183 – IX.
[468] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VIII-IX.
[469] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, IX.290-2, [I can find no pardon, / But only 'Do well and have well and God shall have your soul / And do evil and have evil and expect nothing other / But he that lives evilly shall have an evil end].
[470] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, I.80.

In the opening lines of Passus X Will meets a figure, a friar, who self-confidently claims that Dowell 'soiourneth with vs freres / And euere hath, as Y hope, and euere wol hereafter.'[471] Here, it seems, Will has found a figure, and an order, through which he can do well and save his soul. However, Will immediately rejects the friar's claim with a scholastic '*Contra*', and then appeals to Proverbs 24:16 to argue that no human is without sin and thus rejects the friar's claim that Dowell perpetually dwells with friars. That Will, a figure who could not recognize Holy Church in Passus I, might have enough clergie and knowledge of Scripture to engage in scholastic debate with a Franciscan friar is itself a joke which the poem will shortly return to in the figure of Scripture. Following a brief debate, Will rather courteously departs from the friar going 'forth wyde-whare, walkynge myn one / By a wide wildernesse and by a wode-syde.'[472]

Wandering alone, Will meets Thought who guides him to Wit. Wit leads Will to his wife Dame Study, a figure whom Derek Pearsall notes 'is the first of the personified figures who represent external bodies of knowledge rather than innate faculties.'[473] In a move that recalls and then suggests judgment regarding Will's use of Scripture to reject the friar, Dame Study warns that a little learning can be dangerous and directs Will not towards further introspection (for example, Thought or Wit) but to Clergy and Scripture. As Pearsall notes, this gestures towards Dame Study's argument that 'True learning can be sought only within the strict clerical regime of the school and university and with particular reference to the study of theology and biblical studies.'[474] Will is then 'fayn as

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[471] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, X.18-9, [resides with us friars, / And always has, as I hope, and will forever hereafter].
[472] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, X.60-1, [forth far and wide, walking alone / Beside a savage wilderness and a woodland].
[473] Derek Pearsall, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Version of the C-text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 2008), note 1 p. 201.
[474] Pearsall, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Version,* notes 78-80, p. 204.

foul of faire morwen, / Gladdere then gleman that gold hath to yefte' to hear of Clergy and Scripture.[475] Upon meeting, Clergy teaches Will that if Will desires Dowell he should keep the ten commandments, keep away from sin and 'byleef lely how goddess loue alythe / On the maide Marie for mankynde sake / And bycam a man of that maide withoute mankynde.'[476] Clergy then gestures towards the mysteries of the faith, particularly the trinity, and those 'Patriarchs, and prophets, apostles and angels' who have reflected upon and taught those mysteries over centuries.[477] But Clergy's instruction is interrupted as Scripture 'scorned me [Will] and mony skiles shewed / And continaunce made on Clergie to congeie me, hit semede.'[478] Will weeps, falls off to sleep and is fetched by Fortune who appears briefly before being superseded by Recklessness.

It is not insignificant that Will's encounter with Scripture interrupts his journey and drives him towards the figures of Fortune and Recklessness, figures who reduce God's grace to fate. Indeed, *Piers Plowman* will represent Scripture at least twice in this sequence as a catalyst that drives Will to consider forms of fatalism clothed in Christian language.[479] Specific language in Scripture taken in isolation from Scripture's broader narratives lead Will into forms of thinking that, the poem will argue, are ultimately at

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[475] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.103-4, [happy as a bird on a beautiful morning, / Gladder than a minstrel who just got a gift of gold].
[476] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.141-3, XI.139-44, [believe loyally how God's son alighted / In the maiden Mary for mankind's sake / And became a man of that maid without the intervention of human agency].
[477] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.149-63.
[478] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.160-2, [scorned me and made many arguments / And flashed a look to Clergy to get rid of me, it seemed].
[479] The first being the instance just mentioned at XI.163, the second being Scripture's sermon in XII.37-51 in which Will latches onto the tension between her language of *multi* and *pauci*, puzzles over his election, his reception by Holy Church at the font of baptism and the extension of Christ's call to all people, 'For Crist clepede vs alle, come yf we wolde, / Sarrasynes and sismatikes, and so a ded the Iewes, / And bad hem souke for synne saue at his breste / And drynke bote for bale, brouke hit ho-so myhte: [For Christ called us all, come if we would, / Saracens and schismatics and the Jews as well, / And bade them suck for their sins salvation at his breast / And drink health for harm, enjoy it who may:].In this sequence Will resists the reduction of grace to the fatalism Recklessness has taught precisely by appealing to the narrative Christ and Will's own participation in the church through baptism.

odds with Christ's atoning work depicted through the narratives of Scripture. Langland represents those forms of thinking that rely on isolated Scriptural language to define grace as fate through the figure of Recklessness. As such, Recklessness' teaching merits more detailed analysis because it is a position which Langland's later ecclesial vision will reject precisely because of its misunderstanding of grace, election, the atonement and the implications each have for the church.

Recklessness argues that,

> Clergie saith that he seyh in the seynt euauneglie /
> That Y man ymaed was and my name y-entred /
> In the legende of lyf longe ar Y were. /
> Predestinaet thei prechen, prechours that this sheweth, /
> Or *prescit* inparfit, pult out of grace, /
> Vnwriten for som wikkednesse, as holy writ sheweth.[480]

Here, Recklessness appeals to Clergy and Scripture to justify his view that God's grace is fortune, an inscrutable determination made by God wholly irrespective of human agency. Specifically, Recklessness appeals to the abstract language of predestination and election scattered across the New Testament and also preached by some clerks, 'Predestinaet thei prechen, prechours that this sheweth, / Or *prescit* inparfit.' 'Or *prescit* inparfit' is, in this instance, a technical theological term referring to those whom God foreknows to be imperfect. The conclusion Recklessness draws from this abstracted phrase is encapsulated in the brilliant lines, 'Sothly…ye se by many euydences / That wit ne

[480] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.205-10, [Clergy says he saw in the holy gospel / That I was made man and my name entered / In the book of life long before I was. / They preach men are predestinate, preachers who declare this, / Or beforehand known to be imperfect, thrust out of grace, / Not written down because of some wickedness, as holy writ show].

witness wan neuere the maistrie / Withoute the gifte of god which is grace of fortune.[481] The 'gifte of god which is grace of fortune.'

Recklessness' view and mode of argument are important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, because Recklessness is here removing human agency entirely from the journey of salvation and arguing, by way of employing abstract language from Scripture and its deployment by some members of the clergy, that salvation is inscrutably determined by God regardless of human action. On the other hand, Recklessness justifies equating grace with fate by appealing to Scriptural language and abstract terms of scholastic theology that have been removed from the broader narrative of God's atoning work in Christ. This dislocation of both human agency from the gift of God's grace *and* of the dislocation of the language of election from the narratives of God's atoning work in Christ will become more apparent below when analyzing the mode through which Langland's poetry rejects Recklessness' view precisely through Langland's commitment to the narrative of salvation history. But first, the ecclesial implications of Recklessness' view of grace must be analyzed.

Not surprisingly, the Church is utterly irrelevant for Recklessness. He argues, '…fonde Y neuere in faith, for to telle treuthe, / That clergie of Cristes mouthe comended was euere.'[482] Here, 'clergie' is representative of something like 'book learning' and thus participates in Recklessness' broader argument that human agency, specifically through learning acquired through the church, is utterly irrelevant to salvation. Recklessness goes

[481] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.281-3, [Truly…you see by many kinds of evidence / That neither wit nor quickness ever won the victory / Without God's gift, which is grace of fortune].
[482] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.276-7, […I never ever found, to tell you the truth, / That learning was ever commended by Christ's mouth].

on to argue that even Saint Augustine thought that wise men often end up in hell while the ignorant often enjoy heavenly bliss. Recklessness goes further to assert that,

> …lewede laborers of litel vnderstondyng
> Selde falleth so foule and so depe in synne
> As clerkes of holy kirke that kepe sholde and saue
> Lewede men in good bileue and lene hem at here nede.[483]

The passus closes with Will persuaded to dismiss Clergy and Clergy's counsel, counting it worthless in the face of the 'grace of fortune.' Thus, not only does Recklessness deem useless the learning and formation one is shaped by through participation in the 'clergie' of the church, Recklessness also deems the clerks who serve the church as untrustworthy and useless. Thus, both the praxis and the teachers of the church are rendered unnecessary to the Christian journey on Recklessness' account. Passus XII then opens with Will having his identity absorbed into that of Recklessness. Recklessness' argument has thus not only made the church irrelevant and erased any meaningful identity it might have, but Recklessness' argument has also erased Will's own identity, the baptismal identity he was beginning to remember and grow into through Clergy and Scripture's guidance before falling asleep into the dream of Recklessness.

The last ten passus of *Piers Plowman* offers a subtle process that rejects the content of Recklessness' teaching on grace and the church. Through its unfolding, the poem reimagines grace, the atonement and the church by re-presenting salvation through an entirely different register. This re-presentation is most manifest through four pivotal

[483] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.299-302, […illiterate laborers of little understanding / Seldom fall as foully and deeply into sin / As do clerks of Holy Church who should keep and save / Ignorant men in good belief and give them in their need].

figures whose teachings and modes of instruction Langland uses to correct and recast an alternative theological vision.

Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium,* the Samaritan, and the Christ who harrows hell offer a tapestry of teaching that is grounded not in language dislocated from biblical narratives or abstracted in formulas produced through late-medieval scholastic discourse, but is instead grounded in some of the fundamental mysteries of the faith (especially the trinity and the *imago dei*) coupled with the narratives which culminate in Christ's passion and resurrection. Throughout the proceeding analysis of these four figures, detailed attention will be paid to the distinct capacity of Langland's poetry to re-present (1) multiple diverse images depicting subtle instances of non-competitive double agency that Langland presents as constitutive of grace, (2) a creative and expansive vision of Christ's atonement, which leads to (3) a vision of the church founded in Christ's blood that not only corrects Recklessness' errors but also the errors of late-medieval Christians whose vision of the Church collapse the historical manifestation of the church into an end in itself. The fourth (4) and critical element demonstrates how the teachings of these four figures gives the audience the resources needed to judge the terms under which Conscience offers the Eucharist within Vnity. Specifically, Conscience's Eucharist is seen as a mistake because the conditionality with which he frames the Eucharist departs from the church's foundation in Christ's blood and instead locates the sacrament's foundation in human ethical action. In addition, the teaching and mode of discourse offered through the four figures analyzed here further train the audience to identify Conscience's infamous decision to abandon the Church in the poem's closing lines as a critical error; especially when read in contrast to Will's obedience to Kynde and his

willingness to remain in Vnity, even as it crumbles around him. *Piers Plowman*'s ecclesial vision emerges out of a subtle poetic processes of these four figures interactions.

Will, who has been temporarily subsumed into Recklessness (XII-XIII), only begins to return to himself as Kynde turns Will/Recklessness' gaze towards the mirror of middle earth 'To knowe by vch a creature Kynde to louye.'[484] Through Kynde's intervention and guiding Will to behold the ways through which reason appears in the natural order of creation, Will awakes from his dream within a dream and meets the figure of Imaginatif. Will remains puzzled and in search of Dowell.

§ Remembering Imaginatif

Imaginatif's teaching on Dowell is as beautiful as it is concise. It takes up specific elements of Recklessness' argument and supersedes them. First, Imaginatif explains,

> Y haue folewed the, in fayth, mo then fourty wynter
> And wissed the fol ofte what Dowel was to mene
> And conseyled the for Cristes sake no creature to bygile,
> …
> Lowe the and leue forth in the lawe of holy chirche,
> And thenne dost thow wel, withoute drede, ho can do bet, no force!
> Clerkes that conne al, Y hope they can do bettere,
> Ac hit soffiseth to be saued to be such as Y tauhte.
> Ac for to louye and to lene and lyue wel and byleue
> Is ycalde *Caritas,* Kynde Loue an Engelysche,
> And that is Dobet, yf eny suche be, a blessed man that helpeth

[484] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIII.132, [To learn through each creature how to love Kind].

That pees be and pacience and pore withoute defaute:[485]

Contrary to Recklessness, Imaginatif argues that salvation is not reducible to the inscrutable determination of God alone; but rather a person's salvation is bound up with their willingness to 'Lowe the and leue forth in the lawe of holy chirche.' Such obedience is, for Imaginatif, all that salvation requires. Though, there is a way beyond, the way of *caritas*. Both Dowell and Dobest require human agency, humility, obedience and love. For Will, who was utterly immersed in Recklessness' logic in the preceding passus, Imaginatif's recovery of human agency in the process of salvation is striking; as is Imaginatif's concise yet brilliant description of the grace that makes human agency possible. Here, Langland offers a brilliant thread of the larger tapestry of images that his poetry will weave together to depict human and divine agency as non-competitive. Imaginatif explains,

Ac grace is a graes ther-fore to don hem efte growe; /
Ac grace ne groweth nat til gode-wil gyue reyne /
And woky thorw gode werkes wikkede hertes. /
Ac ar such a wil wexe worcheth god sulue /
And sent forth the seynt espirit to do loue sprynge: /
Spiritus ubi vult spirat. /
So grace withouten grace of god and also gode werkes /
May nat be, be thow syker, thogh we bidde euere.[486]

[485] Langland, *Piers Plowman* XIV.3-5, 9-16, [I have faithfully followed you more than forty winters / And instructed you often on what Do-well means / And counseled you for Christ's sake not to deceive any creature, / … /To humble yourself and to live henceforth in the law of Holy Church / And then you do well, without a doubt, it doesn't matter who can do better, / But Do-well and to be such as I taught suffice for salvation. / But to love and to give and live well and believe / Is called *Caritas,* Natural Love in English, / And that is Do-better, if any such be, a blessed man that helps / Keep the peace and patience and the poor from want].

Grace makes human's able to Dowell and to Dobest, but grace will not grow, Imaginatif teaches, unless "gode-wil" gives rain. This brilliant word play embeds God's will (gode-wil) at the heart of human goodwill (gode-wil), and as the rain necessary for grace to grow within a human being and thereby make a person capable of Dowell and Dobest. A person's good will and good works moistens even wicked hearts, suggesting that even the wicked might be saved. Yet a person's good will and good works are never theirs' alone. For Imaginatif, human good will and good works are only possible because of the gift of the Holy Spirit breathed into the heart. The Spirit stirs a desire for good will and good works, and a person's movement in, through and towards that God-inspired good will moistens even wicked hearts. A person's good will and good work are bound up with God's own will. Human and agency melts before the warmth of divine love and is made free to act through the act of God's Spirit.

Human and divine agency are not collapsed into one another here, nor does one predetermine or coerce the other. Instead, the poetry offers a picture of God's grace and human agency eliding, overlapping, in a mode that is non-competitive, free. The reference to John 3:8 is a lection Recklessness might have readily used to justify his view of election as being independent of human agency and determined by the whimsy of God whose Holy Spirit blows wherever it wills inscrutably and arbitrarily. Yet, Imaginatif appeals to this passage to gesture towards the width of God's grace even to the wicked, and also the need for human participation in the gift for it to become meritorious. Thus

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[486] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.23-29, [But grace is a grassy herb that makes [Do-well and Do-best] grow again; / But grace won't grow until goodwill gives rain / And through good works moistens wicked hearts. / But before such desire grew God himself went to work / And sent forth the Holy Spirit to make love spring up: / *The spirit breatheth where he will.* / So grace without God's grace and good works as well / Cannot be, you can be sure, though we pray forever].

the brilliant line, 'grace withouten grace of god and also gode werkes / May nat be, be thow syker, thogh we bidde euere.' Contrary to Recklessness, grace, for Imaginatif is not reducible to a gift of fortune. Rather grace is the gift of 'gode-wil' blown into the human heart through the Holy Spirit which blows even upon the wicked, to stir up desire for good works which in turn warms hearts to become capable of the love that is salvation. This subtle depiction of grace is the first of several which Langland offers to begin to re-present an alternative view of grace as well as alternative boundaries for Christ's atonement to those posed by Recklessness.

The implications of Imaginatif's view of grace upon his vision of the atonement becomes manifest as Imaginatif takes up one of the very biblical characters Recklessness used to support his fatalistic view of grace as a 'gift of fortune.' Recklessness taught Will,

> A Gode Friday, Y fynde, a feloun was ysaued
> That vnlawefulliche hadde ylyued al his lyf-tyme,
> …
> A robbere was yraunsomed rather then thei alle --
> Withoute penaunce other passioun other eny other peyne
> Passed forth paciently to perpetuel blisse.[487]

For Recklessness, the thief who dies next to Christ is saved without any penance, suffering or pain; and is thus an example of the random nature of God's saving grace which is gifted without any human agency at all. Interpreting the same character,

[487] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.252-3, 257-60, [On Good Friday, I find, a felon was saved / Who had lived his whole lifetime as an outlaw, / … A robber was ransomed sooner than them all [John the Baptist, Adam, Isaiah or any of the prophets]; / Without penance or suffering or any other pain / He passed forth patiently into perpetual bliss].

however, Imaginatif directs Will's attention to the part of the story Recklessness glosses over. Recklessness himself had noted of the thief, 'And for he biknewe on the cross and to Crist shrof hym / He was sunnere ysaued then seynt John the Baptiste, and yet skipped over any significance the man's faith or confession may have played in his salvation.[488] Imaginatif returns to this same scene, this same figure,

> The thef that hadde grace of gode a Gode Fryday, as thow toldest,
> Was for a yeld hym creaunt to Crist and his grace askede.
> And god is ay gracious to alle that gredeth to hym
> And wol no wikkede man be lost bote if he wol hymsulue:
> *Nolo mortem peccatoris, &c.*[489]

The thief was not saved without himself. Rather, he was saved in part because he surrendered his belief up to Christ and called out for grace. Here, this figure becomes an exemplar for Imaginatif's view that God's gift of grace is extended even to the wicked, and that God's grace can stir up the will of a wicked heart to call out to God. Damnation is not, Imaginatif teaches, the will of God but only the result of a person rejecting the grace poured into their heart by the Holy Spirit. And so the thief becomes an example of a person whose desire to call out to God is stirred up through God's gift of grace and then joined by the person to thereby merit their salvation.

Yet, how far does Imaginatif extend the gift of God's healing grace? Will anticipates this question and attempts to determine grace's limits by appealing to clerks

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[488] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XI.252-3, […because he confessed faith on the cross and made confession to Christ / He was saved…].
[489] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.131-4, [The thief had grace of God on Good Friday, as you said, / Because he surrendered his belief up to Christ and asked for his grace. / And God is always gracious to all who cry out to him / And will let no wicked man be lost, unless he wants it himself. / *I desire not the death of the wicked*].

who teach that neither Saracens nor Jews can be saved without baptism.[490] Repeating the often quoted understanding that *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus,* Will suggests the sacrament of baptism as a sort of marker that determines those who are saved. Imaginatif meets Will's proposal with a *'contra'* and a frown of disproval.[491] Imaginatif attests to three different forms of baptism; by water, by bloodshed (martyrdom) and by fire (the illumination of the Holy Spirit). He then points to Trajan as an example of one who was outside the church and yet saved through one of these alternative forms of baptism.[492] Here, it seems, Imaginatif has expanded the reach of grace and Christ's atonement to potentially include all, even those outside the church and the sacrament of baptism, unless a person wills their own damnation and rejects the gift of grace. Imaginatif's teaching, while challenging Recklessness' view of grace and the limits he places on Christ's atonement, runs the risk of doing so only by offering a mirror image of Recklessness' view. If grace is extended to all as a gift of the Holy Spirit poured out into the hearts of even the wicked, and if salvation requires participation in the gift of grace, then Imaginatif's teaching risks grounding human salvation not in the will of God but rather in the human will to participate in the gift of grace. Furthermore, Imaginatif's teaching that salvation extends to those outside the church through the diversity of baptismal forms, risks compromising the specific role of the church and its sacraments, if not making both ultimately irrelevant. On the one hand, Recklessness' portrayal of election proscribes, albeit inscrutable, limits to Christ's atonement to the predestined whom God foreknows thereby nullifying the efficacy of both human agency and the Church. On the other hand, Imaginative's expansion of Christ's atonement to include all

[490] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.197-9.
[491] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.202.
[492] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIV.205-10.

people, even those outside the Church so long as they live according to their law, could also nullify the efficacy of the Church in the other direction. Imaginatif's view makes salvation available to all, but also contingent upon human will. All these tensions gather force in the moment immediately preceding Imaginatif vanishing from the poem. And yet, Imaginatif's teaching seeds in Will's own imagination poetry that points towards a view of human and divine agency that is non-competitive. The development and reinforcement of this teaching by those Will meets next, coupled with more detailed reflection upon the nature of the church, work together to guide the audience to a more robust understanding of grace, the atonement and the church. These seeds will grow significantly in the particular teachings of *Liberum Arbitruim.*

§ *Liberum Arbitrium, caritas* and the church

Prior to meeting *Liberum Arbitrium,* Will awakes from his dream, and from Imaginatif who led him, only to fall asleep again. This time, Will is led by Conscience and Clergy for a meal to dine with a 'master.'[493] Conscience eventually dismisses Clergy from the meal in a not so subtle nod to Recklessness who also dismissed Clergy of all kinds. Conscience then chooses to sojourn with Patience who proceeds to teach Will and Conscience on the virtues of poverty. Patience's teaching on poverty modifies and reproduces that of Recklessness.[494] While the dinner scene of Passus XV and Patience's extended teaching on poverty are worthy of analysis, and much insightful commentary has indeed been offered, I will pass over these scenes to instead consider a portion of the teaching Will receives from the figure he meets following Patience's teaching on poverty,

[493] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XV.
[494] See especially Kate Crasson *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

Liberum Arbitrium. There are hints of a chiastic structure between the contrasting arguments of Recklessness and Imaginatif on the one hand, and the contrasting arguments between Patience and *Liberum Arbitrium* on the other. I pass over the details of the dinner scene and Patience's teaching on poverty to focus upon Imaginatif and *Liberum Arbitrium's* teachings side by side so as to demonstrate the ways in which *Liberum Arbitrium* builds upon and develops that which Will has learned before through Imaginatif.

Just as Imaginatif argues that love is among the chief virtues through which the thief on the cross participates in the grace God extends to him and is thereby saved, so *Liberum Arbitrium's* teaching is an extended reflection on love. In the opening exchange between Will and *Liberum Arbitrium,* the latter offers harsh words to those leaders of Holy Church 'That lyuen ayen holy lore and the loue of charite.'[495] Will latches on to this term, and notes, 'Charite…that is a thyng forsothe / That maistres commenden moche; where may hit be yfounde?'[496] Will's question, 'where may [Charitie] be yfounde' recalls the search for an order, a community or vocation that might claim possession over charity. This is a question and an answer that Will rejected in Passus X when the friar self-confidently proclaimed that Dowell dwelled with his order perpetually. Will's question repeated here returns to the puzzles Recklessness and Imaginatif considered in their respective appeals to a limited vision of the atonement on the one hand, and a universal extension of grace on the other. *Liberum Arbitrum* rejects all three of these options, and instead explains that, 'By clothyng ne by carpynge knowe shaltow hym

[495] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.283, [Who live against holy doctrine and the love of charity].
[496] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.284-5, [Charity…that is a thing indeed / That masters praise much; where can it be found?].

neuere / Ac thorw werkes thow myhte wyte wher-forth he walketh.'[497] *Liberum Arbitrium* goes on to list that he has seen Charity walk in a poor man's clothes, in the robes of different monastic and mendicant orders, in the gilt armor of a knight, in the robes worn by scholastic theologians, among the rich and those in the king's court.[498] The only restriction *Liberum Arbitrium* notes is that, 'Ac biddyng als a beggare byhelde Y hym neuere.'[499] *Liberum Arbitrium* insists that Charity can be found across the full spectrum of society, and that no particular community, order, class, or vocation has claim over charity.

Charity, perhaps similar to Imaginatif's account of the Holy Spirit, blows where it wills and is neither restricted nor controlled by the arbitrary boundaries of social ordering nor by any institution. Love, that virtue which is central to a person's reception of and participation in God's saving grace, extends as wide as the world. Thus, *Liberum Arbitrum*'s vision of the extent of the atonement hints towards key elements of Imaginatif's view as opposed to Recklessness. Furthermore, *Liberum Arbitrium'*s teaching on charity questions the view offered by Patience at the end of the dinner scene. There, Patience connects charity with poverty as the 'chief of all vertues' and comes close to the position offered by the friars of Passus X that Dowell resides with their order perpetually.[500] In contrast, *Liberum Arbitrium* focuses not on poverty, but on charity as the chief of all virtue, and sees charity present in all orders of society and persistently resistant to any attempt to restrict or contain charity to one group or individual in a society. Charity, *Liberum Arbitrium* appropriately argues, is free.

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[497] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.337-8, [You'll never know him by clothing or speech, / But through works you might learn where he walks].
[498] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.339-65.
[499] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.348, '[never beheld [Charity] acting like a beggar].
[500] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XV.275.

Liberum Arbitrium defines the content of charity quite distinctly from Patience's close association of it to poverty. *Liberum Arbitrum* teaches,

> And lele men lyue as lawe techeth and loue therof aryseth
> The whiche is the heued of charite and hele of mannes soule.
>
> *Dilige deum propter deum, id est propter veritatem; Et inimicum tuum propter mandatum, id est propter legem; Et amicum propter amorem, id est propter caritatem.*
>
> Loue god for he is goed and grounde of all treuthe;
> Loue thyn enemye entirely, goddess heste to fulfille;
> Loue thy frende that folleweth thy wille, that is thy fayre soule.
> …
> And that is charite, leue chield, to be cher ouer thy soule;
> Contrarie her nat as in consience yf thow wold come to heuene.[501]

For *Liberum Arbitrium*, charity is not poverty but the love of God, the love of enemy and the love of neighbor grounded in and for the sake of God who is truth. This form of Charity is not reducible to sentiment. Instead, *Liberum Arbitrium* argues that this particular form of charity is the charity which ought to lead Christians and the church out into the world on evangelical missions proclaiming and embodying charity to friends and enemies alike.[502] An evangelical mission that, for *Liberum Arbitrium,* may well result in

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[501] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVII.139-43, 148-9, [And true men live as the law teaches and love arises from that, / Which is the head of charity and salvation of man's soul. / *Love God for the sake of God, that is, for the sake of truth; / your enemy for the sake of the commandment, that is, for the / sake of law; your friend for the sake of love, that is, / for the sake of charity.* / Love God because he is good and ground of all truth; / Love your enemy entirely, God's commandment to fulfill; / Love your friend that follows your will, who is your fair soul. /… / And that is charity, dear child, to be anxious concerning your soul; / Do not contradict her, as in conscience, if you would come to heaven].
[502] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, VXII.160-323.

martyrdom. This is an important element of *Liberum Arbitrium's* teaching because it qualifies the power charity has in the world. That is to say, *Liberum Arbitrium* does not envision charity as a sort of unimpeachable argument, the strength of which will eventually win over and lead to the conversion of non-Christians. Rather, charity is vulnerable to both rejection and violence in the world to which it is offered. This is underscored by *Liberum Arbitrium's* assessment that Constantine's donation was 'venom' and 'poison' to Holy Church. Specifically, *Liberum Arbitrium* does not assume that the church's evangelical mission will build up any sort of empire, or Christendom.[503]

Parallel to Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium* teaches that charity is not limited to the boundaries or identity markers of the church but extends beyond it to include Jews and Saracens.[504] And yet, *Liberum Arbitrium* suggests that the gospel will not coerce non-Christians with argument. Rather, *Liberum Arbitrium* both warns and exhorts the church that faithful proclamation will be met with violence by those powers (religious and otherwise) at odds with such proclamation. This is an important element in *Liberum Arbitrum's* vision of charity and the church because it introduces a vision of those moved by charity and who in turn constitute the church not as a potential majority buffered by the power of Christendom, nor as a predetermined group of the elect visible or invisible, but rather as a diverse and difficult to define *ad hoc* minority group identifiable through a freely chosen commitment to love God, neighbor and enemy alike.[505] Will is ravished by this vision of charity and begs *Liberum Arbitrium* to lead him on to charity.

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[503] Compare Recklessness and *Liberum Arbitrium's* distinct assessments of Christendom (e.g. XVII.220 vs. XII.105).
[504] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, II.105, XVII.220.
[505] Aers' interpretation of *Liberum Arbitrium's* ecclesiology is particularly instructive here, *Beyond Reformation,* p. 170, 'But [*Liberum Arbitrium*] also evoked a very different model of church. Wille asks him, 'What is holy churche, chere [dear] frende?' (XVII.125). His answer is summed up in one word: ''Charite,' he said' (XVII.125). However enigmatic the reply, his gloss on it shows that such a church is far

The image Langland's poetry creates next is extraordinary,

> Thenne louh Liberum Arbitrium and ladde me forth with tales /
> Til we cam into a contre, *Cor-hominis* hit heihte, /
> Erber of alle pryuatees and of holiness. /
> Euene in the myddes an ympe, as hit were, /
> That hihte *Ymago-dei,* graciousliche hit growede.[506]

Liberum Arbitrium does not take Will to the church of Christendom. Nor does he lead Will to an illusory and difficult to discern company of fools ('foles') representing the true church. Instead, *Liberum Arbitrium* leads Will into the heart of humanity (*Cor-hominis*), in the middle of which grows the very image of God (*Ymago-dei*) like a graft. This remarkable image carries forward and develops Imaginatif's earlier representation of grace and human agency. Where Imaginatif envisioned grace as blown into the human heart as the good will of God which melts even wicked human hearts and makes them capable of good will through which God gifts the merit of salvation, *Liberum Arbitrium's* image makes God and God's grace even more intimate, more deeply interwoven into humanity. Grace, for *Liberum Arbitrium,* is not blown into the human heart from outside, rather the very image of God (*Ymago-dei*) is represented as a graft squarely planted in the middle of the human heart set by the Trinity itself. It is upon and through *this* graft that

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removed from the contemporary ecclesiastical polity with its material powers and hierarchies of dominion. Liberum Arbitrium has in mind not such an institution, even if reformed by an armed elite, but rather a form of life freely chosen ('liberum arbitrium' is speaking). The latter is beautifully described as a 'loue-knotte' in which people hold together in 'o will,' lending and selling with integrity, a memory of relations in the Pentecostal community founded by the Holy Spirit (XVII.125-29; XXI.213-61). No hierarchy and no conventional signs of divisions between laity and clergy can even be glimpsed in this model.'

[506] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.3-8, [Then Free Will laughed and led me forth with tales / Until we came to into a country called *Cor-hominis,* / Garden of all mysteries and holiness. / Squarely in the middle a graft, as it were, / That's named *Ymago-dei* graciously grew].

human beings grow.[507] God plants God's image squarely in the middle, at the very core, of humanity and it is upon and through God's image planted at the core of humanity that humanity grows.

This picture offers another, even more sophisticated representation of the mysterious overlaps and elisions of human and divine agency constitutive of grace. It is an image that both subverts and surpasses the flat dichotomies drawn between human and divine agency that had become pervasive in late-medieval scholastic semi-pelagian debates.[508] Human agency, in the terms of this image, is unimaginable apart from God's grace because human agency itself is both created and empowered by God. As such, the image blocks any attempt to represent human agency apart from the creative and empowering grace of God. Human agency is itself a gift, and thus merit and salvation are thereby seen through a lens in which the giftedness of human agency is not seen as competitive with nor possible apart from God's grace.

Liberum Arbitrium's mode of teaching in this scene is as significant as the image he offers. He leads Will to this vision 'with tales.' Specifically, the image itself is presented within a narrative through which key figures, the trinity, the fiend, etc., respectively create and attack the tree of charity. *Liberum Arbitrium* recasts theological terms (*Potencia-dei-patris* and *Sapiencia-dei-patris*) previously abstracted from

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[507] See Augustine *Confessions,* lib. 3, cap. 6, linea 57, 'tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo ['You [God] were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me'], trans. Henry Chadwick *Saint Augustine Confessions* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 43. Julian of Norwich rendered a similar sentiment contemporary to Langland, 'And so I saw most surely that it is quicker for us and easier to come to the knowledge of God than it is to know our own soul. For our soul is so deeply grounded in God and so endlessly treasured that we cannot come to knowledge of it until we first have knowledge of God, who is the Creator to whom it is united', see *Julian of Norwhich Showings* trans. Edmund Colledge, OSA and James Walsh, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 288.

[508] See William J. Courtenay *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and Heikiko Oberman *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

scriptural narratives by figures like Recklessness, and places them back in the context of the economy of salvation. This becomes abundantly apparent following *Liberum Arbitrium's* brief teaching on marriage, when Will asks *Liberum Arbitrium* to allow someone to shake the tree of charity so that the ripe fruit might fall. Immediately the poetry enters into an imaginative depiction of the fall of the fruit, a retelling of the story of humanity's fall in the garden of Eden, then the witness of the patriarchs, the annunciation, incarnation, and a summary narrative of Jesus' ministry up until the moment of Judas' betrayal in another garden.[509] *Liberum Arbitrium's* imagistic and narrative representation of the mystery of grace literally cascades into a retelling of the 'tale', the narratives that make up the economy of salvation which culminate in Christ's passion. And yet, *Liberum Arbitrium* does not offer Will the story of the passion in full. His telling of the tale is interrupted when Will awakes at the moment of Judas betraying Jesus in the garden.

Will awakes 'nere frentyk' [almost frantic], panting for the tale to continue.[510] He meets another character in the story, Abraham, a representative of both the theological virtue of faith and the biblical patriarch in whom God establishes a covenant relationship with Israel. Langland here couples a potentially abstract virtue, faith, with a figure and a narrative that shapes and informs the meaning of the virtue itself. This mode of teaching is far removed from figures like Recklessness, the friar, and the Master of Passus XV who all taught Will by way of abstracting theological language. Significant also is that Will meets this Abraham not simply in the blank chronology on one damn thing after another. Rather, Will meets this figure 'a Mydde-Lentones Sonenday' [on Mid-lent

[509] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXIII.112-79.
[510] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.178.

Sunday], within the liturgical time of the church's worship.[511] Thus, just as Will is being led on by figures who continue the tales of Christ's passion, he is simultaneously swept up into a form of time that is ordered by the practices of the church's worship. Abraham offers Will another summary gloss of the trinity, creation, Old Testament history and the incarnation until the two meet another figure along the way. *Spes*, or hope, affirms Abraham's teaching on the trinity and adds the 'greatest commandment' to love God and neighbor. Will attempts to dismiss *Spes,* 'Go thy gate [Get out of here]', on the grounds that his, and Abraham's, teaching on the trinity and the law of neighbor love are inconceivable.[512] The three continue walking along until they meet a Samaritan; a figure of the third theological virtue, love, embodied. Lest the hurried reader miss Langland's point, this third and authoritative teacher is represented via a story within a story, a parable offered by Christ himself within the narrative of salvation. As previous interlocutors' errant theological positions are corrected and superseded, Will is led along on his journey towards truth by way of stories layered upon stories replete with images outside of which the kind of technical second order theological language used by Recklessness is utterly unintelligible.

§ The Samaritan's rescue

The Samaritan takes up key elements of Abraham and *Spes'* teachings by offering creative images that work together to represent a vision of grace, the atonement and the church that remembers and develops positions previously explored through Imaginatif and *Liberum Arbitrium.* While the Samaritan's teaching on the nature of grace has been

[511] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.181.
[512] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.44.

examined previously (see Chapter 2.2), a few elements are worth recalling here. First, the Samaritan's representation of *Semyuief* depicts a person so wounded by sin that he literally cannot move to help himself, 'For he ne myhte stepe ne stande ne stere foet ne handes / Ne helpe hymsulue sothly.'[513] *Semyuief* is entirely dependent upon the Samaritan to save his life. There is no hint in this narrative that *Semyuief* might, as the popular phrase of the *via moderna* suggested, *facere quod in se est,* or do that which is in him. Wounded and bound on the roadside, *Semyuief* has absolutely no agency of his own with which he might heal himself. He cannot even wiggle a toe towards untying the ropes of his bondage. Once the Samaritan arrives, anoints and unbinds *Semyuief;* the Samaritan then takes *Semyuief* to a grange, the church. Here, *Semyuief's* agency becomes critical. In fact, *Semyuief's* healing is left up to the contingency of his participation in his own healing within the care of the inn keeper and other guests, 'And lefte hym there a-lechyng, to lyue yf he myhte.'[514] Derek Pearsall's rendering of the grammar here differs from Economou's in a way that points to Langland's gestures towards the overlaps and elisions constitutive of human agency and God's grace that Langland has so carefully crafted throughout the poem. Pearsall renders the lines thus, 'And left him there *to be healed*, to live *if he had the strength.*'[515] The passive 'to be healed' invites the audience to imagine that *Semyuief* will be brought to health by the continued care of someone outside of himself, the innkeeper perhaps, much the same way as the Samaritan arrived as an outside actor to save *Semyuief*'s life on the roadside. Yet, the line continues in a way that makes *Semyuief*'s healing contingent upon his own strength, his own agency. He will

[513] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.56-7, [For he could neither step nor stand nor stir a foot or hands / Nor help himself in anyway…].
[514] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.75, [And left him there for healing, to live if he might].
[515] Pearsall, *William Langland Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition*, p. 312, XIX.75.

only live, the line suggests, if he [*Semyuief*] has the strength. Specifically, the strength, the Samaritan says, to receive 'the bloed of a barn' [the blood of a child].[516]

The Samaritan continues,

> And thouh he stande and steppe, riht stronge worth he neuere
> Til he haue eten al that barn and his bloed drunken…
> And yut bote they leue lelly vpon that litel baby,
> That his lycame shal lechen at the laste vs alle.[517]

The Samaritan teaches Will that *Semyuief* will only survive if he receives all the body and blood of this child and believes that this child's body will heal all people in the end. Here again, Langland is including, while simultaneously qualifying, human agency in the economy of salvation. *Semyuief* cannot save himself. And yet, his strength, his agency, is a necessary component of his healing. That healing, and the strength to participate in it, is contingent upon receiving and believing fully in another. Will, however, is not yet ready to receive the subtleties of the Samaritan's teaching concerning the connection between the Incarnation and the Eucharist. He is still puzzled by Abraham and *Spes'* respective teaching on the trinity.[518]

Before departing from the Samaritan's instruction, four elements of the Samaritan's teaching in particular stand out. First, the Eucharistic emphasis that *Semyuief's* life is contingent upon the blood of Christ. Second, that Christ's healing blood must be received by *Semyuief* and that this will require a degree of strength (albeit a

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[516] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.86.
[517] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.89-90, 94-5, [And though he stand up and take a step, he'll never get strong / Till he has eaten all that child and drunk his blood, /… / And further unless they believe loyally in that little child, / That his body will heal us all in the end.].
[518] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.96.

strength that is only enabled by the Samaritan's saving act). Third, that the place in which *Semyuief* will receive the blood and body of Christ is in the grange under the care of the innkeeper. And fourth, the Samaritan's hint that the blood of Christ received at the inn extends to all. The Samaritan's vision of grace echoes those representations of grace that craft a picture of human agency and God's grace not as competitive, but as mysteriously doubled, cooperating. God's saving act is primary, *and* God-enabled human agency is represented as necessary for human salvation. Furthermore, the Samaritan's teaching grounds human salvation in the very blood of Christ and extends the hope of salvation in and through Christ's blood to all. Lastly, the church, figured as the grange, or inn, is portrayed by the Samaritan as the context in which *Semyuief* might come to health as he receives little by little the fullness of Christ's body and blood. A final, and key, element of the Samaritan's teaching adds yet another layer of nuance to his depiction of grace, the atonement and the church.

As the Samaritan guides Will into another image representing the mystery of the trinity, that of a taper; the Samaritan insists that unkindness, unkindness against the Holy Ghost, against one's fellow Christians or the killing of another human being for their property, will not be forgiven, 'Leue Y neuere that oure lord at the laste ende / Wol louye that lyf that loue and charite destruyeth.'[519] This appears to be a significant qualification to the Samaritan's hints towards Christ's blood offering a universal salvation to all. God will not save all persons, it seems, rather God will reject those who are unkind. Will, hedging his bets, asks the Samaritan whether he might be saved were he guilty of such

[519] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.277-8, [I'll never believe that our Lord at the last end / Will love that life that destroys charity].
[519] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.96

unkindness and was now moved to contrition, confession and begged for God's mercy.[520] The Samaritan says, 'Yus…so thow myhtest repente / That rihtwisnesse thorw repentaunce to reuthe mythe turne.'[521] A qualified 'yes', that is underscored by his final words,

> For ther ne is sike ne sory ne non so moche wreche
> That he ne may louye, and hym lyke, and lene of his herte
> Goed wil, goed word bothe, wischen and wilnen
> Alle manere men mercy and foryeuenesse,
> And louye hem yliche hymsulue and his lyf amende.[522]

The Samaritan is clear that Christ's blood offers salvation to all. This salvation, however, can only be realized through one's active reception of Christ's blood through the Eucharist within the care of the church. The Samaritan also insists that those who are unkind to the Holy Ghost and their neighbors will be rejected by God unless they earnestly seek repentance, and that such earnest repentance is seldom performed. Will then awakens, his vision again interrupted, prior to the full telling of the passion and resurrection. Langland will now offer one final Christ figure, quite literally the Christ who harrows hell, to add one last layer to the poem's dialectic unfolding of grace, the atonement and the church.

§ *Christus Victor*

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[520] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.279-81.
[521] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.283-4, [Yes…provided you repent so / That through repentance righteousness might turn to pity. / But it is very seldom seen].
[522] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XIX.324-9, [For there is none so sick or sorry or so wretched / That he may not love, if he likes, and give from his heart / Good will, a good word as well, to wish and will / All manner of men mercy and forgiveness, / And love them like himself, that he may not amend his life].

Passus XX opens with Will wandering like a vagrant, weary, falling asleep and entering into another vision. He beholds the scene of Palm Sunday, with children crying *osanna* as 'Oen semblable to the Samaritaen and somdeel to Pers the ploughman / Barefoot on an asse bake boetles cam prikynge.'[523] The vision moves quickly from Christ's entrance into Jerusalem, Pilate's order and then to the execution. Following the death of this Samaritan/Piers figure, Will beholds a vision of Christ's work performed on Holy Saturday, that veiled time of darkness between Christ's passion and resurrection, through a discussion between four sisters; Mercy, Righteousness, Justice, and Peace. Langland uses these sisters to illustrate the tensions of a theology that holds together mercy with righteousness, justice with peace. The differences between the squabbling siblings at first appear irreconcilable. From a vantage that allows both a sight of hell, in all its darkness and agony, and the flash of the coming light of Christ racing towards hell's gates, Peace speaks with great hope about what Christ's light will bring,

> My wil is to wende…and welcomen hem alle
> That many day myhte Y nat se for merkenesse of synne,
> Adam and Eue and other mo in helle.
> …
> Loue that is my lemman such lettres he me sente
> That Mercy, my sustur, and me to maynprisen hem alle
> And that Crist hath conuerted the kynde of rihtwisnesse
> Into pees and pyte of his puyr grace.[524]

[523] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.8-9, [One who resembled the Samaritan and Piers the plowman somewhat / Barefoot came riding bootless on an ass's back].
[524] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.179-81, 185-90, [My wish is to go…and welcome them all / Who for many a day I could not see for murkiness of sin, / Adam and Eve and many others in hell. /… / Love, who

Peace envisions a welcome party for all humanity soon to be liberated from hell by this coming light. Mercy and Peace will not only bail humanity out of hell through the letters patent issued by Christ, but Christ, Peace hopes, will convert the very kynde of righteousness into peace and pity. With a line that appeals to those familiar with sibling rivalries across generations, Righteousness baulks at Peace's proposal of a conversion that will not only erase Righteousness' identity, but subsume it into that of her sister Peace. Righteousness protests, 'Rauest thow?... or thow art riht dronke!'[525] Righteousness insists,

> At the bigynnynge of the world god gaf the doem hymsulue
> That Adam and Eue and al his issue
> Sholde deye down-riht and dwelle in payne euere
> Yf that thei touched that tre and of the fruyt eten.[526]

God's judgment is eternal and unchanging, Righteousness argues. Fallen sinful humanity is doomed to die forever. God's just punishment is permanent. The debate continues, with additional commentary from Justice, but Langland refuses to settle the tensions through debate. Instead, Langland recasts the tensions at the heart of Peace and Righteousness' argument back into the narrative of salvation history as the sisters' debate is interrupted

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is my lover, sent me such letters / That my sister Mercy and I shall save mankind, / And that God has forgiven and granted to all mankind / Mercy, my sister, and me to bail them all out; / And that Christ has converted the nature of righteousness / Into peace and pity out of his pure grace].

[525] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.193, [Do you rave?...Or are you just drunk!].

[526] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.196-9, [At the world's beginning, God gave the judgment himself / That Adam and Eve and all their issue / Should downright die and dwell in pain forever / If they touched that tree and ate of its fruit].

by ‘A vois loude in that liht’ that speaks to Lucifer holed up in hell, and demands the abolition of the prisoner’s enslaved therein.[527]

Having jousted for humanity upon the cross, Christ now descends into hell as a burst of luminous light to claim that which he has won, ‘Y fauht so m fursteth yut for mannes soule sake.’[528] Christ himself proclaims that he did not fight for a few, but rather ‘shal Y come as kynge, with croune and with angeles, / And haue out of helle alle mennes soules.’[529] Christ, Langland imagines, is bound to a radical universal soteriology because of the nature of the Incarnation through which God in Christ has become ‘brethrene of o bloed’ [brothers of one blood] with all humanity. Christ binds Lucifer and his minions with chains, and Christ leads out of hell ‘Tho ledes that Y louye and leued in my comynge’, all his “brethrene of o bloed” bound together through the Incarnation and Christ’s Passion.[530] This image of the twin soteriological implications of the Incarnation and the Passion project a hope that the God who has become human in Christ will indeed save all humanity who believes in Christ through the resurrection. Will awakens from this vision by the ringing of church bells on Easter morning, and he quickly calls his wife and daughter to pilgrim with him to worship.

§ Langland’s ecclesial catechesis

A dialectical reading of the representations of grace, the atonement and the church unfolded through Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbirtrium*, the Samaritan and the Christ who harrows hell prepare Langland’s audience to make specific judgments about

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[527] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.274-7, [a loud voice within that light].
[528] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.407, [I fought so, I thirst even more for the sake of man’s soul].
[529] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.413-4, [I shall come as king, with crown and with angles, / And have out of hell all men’s souls].
[530] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XX.444, [The people I love and who believe in my coming].

Conscience's departure from Vnity in the poem's closing lines. The debates between Recklessness and Imaginatif concerning the nature of human agency and God's grace, subvert theologies that might exclude human agency from human salvation. As Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium* and the Samaritan teach through a myriad of creative tales and images; God's grace is necessary and prior to any human agency insofar as God's gifting of grace enables human beings and makes them capable of participating in the 'gode-will' which merits the gift of salvation. This gifting does not take place purely in the will or the mind, but includes embodied participation in the blood and body of Christ which is received at the grange, or church, in the Samaritan's telling. As if to block any attempt to limit Christ's atonement to those baptized in the hierarchical institution of the late-medieval Roman Church, Langland's final Christ figure makes it clear that the implications of the Incarnation stretch beyond institutions and rituals because through the Incarnation, God in Christ has made God's-self 'brethrene of o bloed' with all humanity. The Samaritan's teaching that *Semyuief* can only be healed through participating in the Eucharist, and the community through which it is offered, is not however excluded. In fact, Christ's recollection that it is through his very blood, not will or knowledge, that binds God and humanity in Christ emphasizes the implications of the Samaritan's teaching on the Eucharist. Reception of the Eucharist, and the gift of the church through which Christ's blood is received, can be seen from the perspective of both the Samaritan and the Christ who harrows hell as a gracious means through which God heals and restores humanity. This is punctuated by Will hurrying in joy towards the church's bells singing the hope of the resurrection on Easter Sunday to receive Christ's body and blood.

And yet, by giving the Christ who harrows hell the last words, Langland is also emphasizing an indebtedness to and development of an Anselmian theological inheritance that locates the ultimate cause of salvation in the atoning work of Jesus Christ achieved through the incarnation and passion. God's saving acts, not Will's, are the cornerstone and foundation of the church's resurrection hope. Blood, not knowledge, not will, is the foundation of both the church and human salvation. Langland's commitment to the narratives of God's economy of salvation leads him to establish the church through an image that reflects a robust theology of the incarnation. Specifically, Langland's representation of the incarnation, that Christ is 'brethrene of o bloed' with all humanity, and the soteriological and ecclesial implications through Grace's establishment of the church offer an imaginative and theologically instructive teaching regarding the ecclesial implications of Chalcedon. Christ is one person in two natures, and thus Christ's union with the church, opens up the imaginative possibility to envision participation in the church's life as a means of participation in and transformation through unity with God's divine nature. Through the Eucharist, the person of Christ, in body and blood, is extended to those who, the Samaritan teaches, receive Christ's body and blood fully in their own bodies through their participation in Eucharistic lives that include reconciliation between God and also material restitution with fellow human beings.

Here, Langland's poetry does something quite distinct from contemporary debates concerning transubstantiation.[531] That is to say, the poetry moves beyond flat dichotomies of transubstantiated versus spiritual presence, beyond fetishization of the host and beyond dismission of Christ's real presence in the meal. Instead, Langland invites the audience to

[531] See de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*; Ian Christopher Levy *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in its Medieval Context* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2015); Aers *Sanctifying Signs*.

imagine participation in the Eucharistic life of the church as a participation in the very life of God which heals human souls through a grace that is as equally oriented to social practices of justice as it is to a mystical corporate union with God. It is here that Langland's ecclesial vision perhaps most powerfully echoes the retrieval of the patristic and Augustinian vision de Lubac retrieves through *Corpus Mysticum* and describes through *The Splendor of the Church.* Langland's poetic inquiry maintains space for mystery as well as the overlapping unities of the sacraments of Christ's body upon the altar and Christ's body the church. The compilation of these four teachings and the authority the poem grants to these figures, coupled with the dialectical mode through which their teachings interact, set Langland's audience up to make specific judgments about Conscience's leadership of, and ultimate departure from Vnity in the poem's final scenes. While Conscience fails to guide the folk to embody this mystical, material and participatory vision of Eucharistic life through the church, his failure does not erase the poem's ecclesial vision. Conscience's failure is itself instructive.

Chapter 2.1 analyzed Langland's representation of Conscience's turning, a turning or formation, that was shown to be significantly influenced by his time at court. Having now outlined the teachings of Imaginatif, *Liberum Arbitrium*, the Samaritan and Christ, Conscience's treatment of the Eucharist and the church is discernable as a significant and errant departure from the instruction of the poem's most authoritative voices. Three aspects make this evident: the conditionality under which Conscience offers the Eucharist; the form of church Conscience organizes; and Conscience's decision to abandon Vnity.

In Passus IV and V, the king's court is established by a conditional view of justice taught by Reason. Disobedience to the law results in punishment, while conferring fealty to the king garners reward. This is a view of justice that is ultimately conditional upon the maintenance of laws which are themselves written by the slew of lawyers dubiously influenced by Lady Mede. In Passus XXI, while Conscience no longer acts as a constable at court, his formation in that particular context seeds a vestige memory of conditional justice. This becomes evident when Conscience calls the people into Vnity to receive the Eucharist. Conscience withholds the sacrament of Christ's body and blood on condition that the people uphold the conditions of the pardon extended to Piers in Passus IX, *redde quod debes.*[532] The folk infamously draw out the explicit conditionality of Conscience's Eucharist: 'How? ... thow conseylest vs to yelde / Al that we owen eny wyhte or that we go to hosele?'[533] 'That is my conseil', says Conscience.[534] Conscience's perspective on the Eucharist is nothing novel in late medieval England. Thomas Brinton's 1383 Easter sermon, for example, condemns 'usurers' who fail to 'make proper restitution of what [they have] unjustly acquired', as well as 'merchants who use false measures with which he deceive his neighbors or poor pilgrims.'[535] Brinton here echoes not only Conscience's emphasis on human to human restitution as conditional for the reception of the Eucharist, but also a similar confident assessment of human agency voiced by the friar in Passus X. Brinton urges his audience to 'rise from sin

[532] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.390.
[533] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.391-2, ['Come again? ... you counsel us to give back / All that we owe anybody before going to communion?'].
[534] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.393, ['That's my advice'].
[535] Thomas Brinton, *Sermons,* ed. Mary Aquinas Delvin, O.P., Camden Third Series 85-6 (continuous pagination) (London: Royal Historical Society, 1954), 2:492-6 and 466 (BR-107 and end of 101). See also *Preaching in the Age of Chaucer: selected sermons in translation* trans. Siegfried Wenzel (The Catholic University of America Press: Washington, D.C. 2008), p. 130.

quickly…perfectly and without relapse…as far as it lies in him.'[536] Here, Brinton, like Conscience, focuses his Easter sermon not on the atonement won through Christ's passion to reconcile God and humanity, but rather upon the human agency one must employ to arise from sin through church governed practices to satisfy human to human restitution.

The terms through which Conscience extends the Eucharist in this scene, and upon which Briton focuses his Easter sermon, as well as the view of human agency assumed by both Brinton and the friar of Passus X, are far removed from the vision of Christ's atonement which converted Justice into Peace in Passus XX. It is equally far removed from the insistence of the Samaritan that human salvation is grounded in the blood and body of Christ, not perfect adherence to an ethic of human-to-human restitution. While the Samaritan does insist that unkindness, specifically violence against one's neighbor out of covetousness for property, is unforgiveable, Christ qualifies the soteriological implications of human ethics by insisting, in Anselmian fashion, that Christ bind's himself to save humanity through the Incarnation which makes God in Christ "brethrene of o bloed" with humanity. This is necessary for human salvation, in Anselm's terms, because the debt humanity owes as a result of sin is infinite. For Anselm, it is not possible for human beings to *redde quod debbes.* Indeed, this is the tension point upon which the whole of *Cur deus homo* hangs and the lens through which Anselm discovers the beauty of the Incarnation's soteriological implications taught through the Chalcedonian Creed. For Anselm, only God God's-self is capable to repay humanity's infinite debt, and thus the Incarnation is supremely fitting as God's gracious act as a supererogatory repaying of the debt only humanity owed but which only God was able to

[536] *Ibid.,* pp. 127, 131, 132.

repay. As such, the Eucharist is not a seal of human-to-human restitution (though it certainly points towards it), but rather to the supererogatory satisfaction of restitution between humanity and God that Christ accomplishes perfectly through the atonement. God's gracious act in Christ opens the possibility for human-to-human restitution, but it is not the condition for the atonement. That condition is already met, indeed paradoxically surpassed, through Christ's passion.

In his conditional offering of the Eucharist, Conscience seems to have forgotten, or perhaps his formation at court predisposed him to reject the idea, that human salvation is ultimately dependent upon God's act in Christ not human adherence to the strict terms of *redde quod debbes*.[537] And yet, the audience remembers the Samaritan who insisted that *Semyuief's* healing would only be possible if he received fully the blood and body of Christ. Held together, the dialectical unfolding of the Samaritan and Christ's teaching suggest that the Eucharist is to be offered to humanity as a celebration of and invitation into the atonement, the restitution, that God has effected in Christ. It is to be a sign and a sacrament that makes human beings holy through Christ's blood. Grace is a healing that transforms not merely the mind, nor human actions, but also the material and social elements of human life. Conscience is not wrong for including human-to-human restitution as part of the Eucharist. Indeed, such restitution is what the Samaritan seems to hope for *Semyuief* as *Semyuief* learns to participate little by little in the body and blood of Christ. However, Conscience errs in making reception of the Eucharist contingent upon human agency rather than Christ's blood.

Here, at the very heart of the church's life - the Eucharist - de Lubac's ecclesial vision begins to offer a helpful lens through which to see Langland's. Specifically, the

[537] Conscience had, after all, dismissed Clergy and [clergy's counsel] at the dinner scene (XV).

teachings of the Samaritan and the Christ who harrows hell, juxtaposed with Conscience's praxis, demonstrate the way that the Eucharist stands as a sort of translucent medium through which the church presents Christ and communicates grace. That is to say, the Eucharist, like the church, is not to be confused as an end in itself. Rather, both the Eucharist and the church itself are understood as translucent mediums. Gifts that are necessary for the healing and salvation of humanity, gifts that cannot be left behind or discarded, and yet gifts that humanity ought always to see *through*, beyond. Church and Eucharist, in this sense, are both necessary for seeing and yet not the thing to be seen. Both are Christ and yet point beyond themselves towards Christ in resurrected glory one with the Father and the Spirit. Conscience, in his desperate attempt to protect the church and heal his fellow Christians facing anti-Christ's siege, confuses the nature of the church and the sacrament. In his frantic hands, the church is reformed into a fortress and the Eucharist reimagined as a law. Vnity begins to crumble as it becomes a mirror image of the king's court clothed in Christian language. This because Vnity is grounded not in Christ's atoning blood, but rather in the conditional maintenance of human-to-human restitution as the requirement rather than the divinely empowered aspiration of fallen humanity.

Conscience's error of grounding salvation in human action rather than the blood of Christ is something the poem's final passus hints towards multiple times. Indeed Conscience had first committed this error, and Langland's poetry highlights the nature of it, in his establishment of Vnity itself. While Grace, the Holy Spirit, had established the very foundation of the church (Vnity) with the mortar of Christ's blood and wattled its walls with the pain of Christ's passion, Conscience calls the people into penance and

thereby founds the church not in Christ's blood but rather in the people's penitent tears, 'Clannesse of the comune and clerkes clene lyuynge / Made Vnite holi churche in holinesse stande.'[538] Langland punctuates Conscience's error by ironically depicting Conscience as pridefully admiring his newly fortified church, dismissive of none other than Pride and anti-christ's ensuing siege.[539] Establishing the church in the purity of the common people and clerics clean living makes Vnity more, rather than less, vulnerable to Pride and the siege of anti-Christ. For, when Friar Flattery enters Vnity and seduces Contrition to forget herself, Vnity's foundation, the pure tears of the penitent folk, is washed away and Vnity crumbles.

Piers Plowman gives its audience all the tools it needs to interpret Conscience's departure from this church founded upon the penitent tears of human beings. First, the Samaritan's tale whereby *Semyuief* is entrusted to the innkeeper at the grange and the gradual healing effected through reception of the Eucharist questions Conscience's decision to abandon the institution through which the medicine of God's grace is freely offered. This is emphasized by Kynde, who commands Will to remain in Vnity, even as it crumbles from within, because it is only here that Will might learn to love. Second, the poem's long depiction of both Will and Conscience's malleability, and susceptibility to malformation, emphasizes both the need for good teachers and the danger of trusting one's-self to discern that which is good. Yet, Will and Conscience end up in very different places at the poem's end: Will remains within Vnity, while Conscience leaves crying out for grace in search of Piers the Plowman. Many interpreters of Langland's

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[538] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.379-80, [Purity of the common people and clerics' clean living / Made Unity, Holy Church, stand in holiness].
[539] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXI.379-80, 'Y care nat now,' quod Consience, 'thow Pryde come nouthe' ['I sure don't care', said Conscience, 'if Pride comes now'].

great work praise Conscience's departure, in a rather Kantian mode, as courageous.[540] Yet, this is to ignore the poem's rigorous and sustained critique of the trustworthiness of the self.[541] Langland, however, does not resign his ecclesiology to a conservative commitment to an institution that his own poetry has shown to be corrupt.

Piers Plowman intentionally shifts the modes of Will's instruction as he encounters more virtuous teachers. As Will is led away from errant views that might suggest that he could save himself by either his own knowledge ('kynde kynowing') or will ('dowell'), and is drawn deeper into the saving mysteries of the trinity and the incarnation, Langland represents those more trustworthy guides as leading Will on by way of stories and images rather than abstract concepts and second order theological language. The poetry also blocks those teachers who pridefully assumed that they or their respective order might perfectly embody the life that leads to salvation. Instead, Will's journey towards truth is constituted by guides, stories and images as he is swept up into the liturgical time of the church's worship and sacramental practices. Will's faithfulness to remain in Vnity is not reducible to his obedience to a divine command or a reformist ecclesiology. Rather, it gestures towards something the poem has carefully worked to teach its audience throughout its dialectical unfolding. The church is a necessary part of the Christian journey towards salvation, and this is because Langland imagines salvation as equally social, material and mystical. However, the church must not be confused with the strict boundaries of the institutional, hierarchical and landed institution of the late-

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[540] See Walter W. Skeat's Commentary in *The Vision of William Langland Concerning Piers the Plowman: In Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless by William Langland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886, repr. 1924, 1956) vol. 2 (of 2), pp. 285-6. See also Mary Carruthers *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in* Piers Plowman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), and Aers in *Beyond Reformation*, pp. 171-2.

[541] See Chapter 1.

medieval church. The church, Langland teaches, includes and sometimes stretches beyond those institutions claiming the name 'church.' This is not because God's promise of the Holy Spirit might fail. Rather, as Langland shows through the turning of various figures throughout the poem, it is due to the fallenness of humanity, and the capacity twisted human wills might have to claim for themselves powers that only properly belong to God. This is a reality Langland, Ockham and other medieval Christians wrestled with explicitly as they beheld with horror the violence and pomposity of the Great Schism. The church, Langland teaches, is discernable, as *Liberum Arbitrum* taught concerning charity, not by title or vestment, but 'Ac thorw werkes thow myhte wyte wher-forth he walketh.'[542] And the stride of the church, as Langland's teachers have stressed in both content and form, is discernable through the praxis of telling the stories and participating in them through the transforming mysteries of the sacraments.

§ Conclusion

Langland's ecclesiology cannot be limited to congregationalists terms, if by congregationalist one infers only those Christians and communities perceived outside of the *corpus permixtum* of the broader Catholic Church.[543] *Piers Plowman* suggests, through a subtle dialectic, that even in the midst of the church's error the faithful might still discover the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is, for Langland, not necessarily confined to the institution of the late-medieval church, but is rather discovered in the practice of telling and sacramentally participating in the story of Christ's incarnation, passion, and

[542] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVI.340, ['But through works you might learn where he walks'].
[543] That is to say, Langland's ecclesiology is not limited to include figures like Haisia Moon, Margery Kemp, and Walter Brut; but extends also to include, however paradoxically, all those who might tell the story of Christ's passion and pass on the images that inspire human beings towards the mystery of the trinity.

resurrection. For Langland, Will's journey is shaped by the tales, the liturgical ordering of time and the sacraments that form individual and corporate life through those mysteries. Langland argues against reducing any ecclesial practice to a mechanistic or human controlled conferral or grace, *a la* Conscience's mishandling of the Eucharist. Instead, the poetry's iconoclasm consistently subverts the reification of grace by insisting that the church's task is, as de Lubac would say, not to become an end in itself but rather to be constantly at work representing Christ and communicating grace. The Church is Christ and exists for the purpose of drawing God's beloved into union with Christ.

De Lubac's vision of the church as a sort of 'translucent medium' thus emerges as a helpful lens through which to consider Langland's depiction of the nature and identity of the church. Langland depicts the church as necessary for the Christian life, while ruthlessly laying bare its corruptions in late-medieval England. While Langland examines and warns against the church's corruptions more critically than de Lubac, Langland and de Lubac seem to agree that the church is not to be considered an end in itself. Neither the Samaritan nor Kynde deem the church's corruptions in the poem's closing lines as justification for abandoning the community established in Christ's blood. The Samaritan and Kynde remain committed to the social, material and mystical facets of the church practiced through the Eucharist as necessary for fallen humanity to be healed. The nature of the church, at least as argued through some of the most authoritative voices in *Piers Plowman,* is to guide pilgrims into union with God through Christ by way of the stories and sacraments that sweep human life up into God's binding the two as 'brethrene of o bloed.' Langland's poetry argues with great subtlety that this is not equivalent to being swept up into the church as a historical, material or hierarchical institution. Indeed,

Langland's poetry rigorously displays the myriad corruptions besieging the church as well as the possibility of charity outside those marked by baptism. Rather, Langland's poetry urges pilgrims to seek truth through the tales and sacraments that consistently re-tell the economy of salvation which culminates in the passion and resurrection of Christ.

It is an economy quite at odds with the material economies developing in late medieval England that Langland has depicted as corrupting both the church and the wider world through the seductions of Mede. In step with de Lubac, Langland argues that the church is never to be confused as an end in itself, but rather exists only to communicate and unite fallen humanity with Christ,

> We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bonds cannot be broken.[544]

The historical form of the church and its practices, despite its many failings, cannot be superseded, nor should it be made into an idol. The church in which both Will and *Semyuief* remain at the poem's end is necessary, broken and yet filled with the Holy Spirit. While Langland has taught his audience to be critical of Conscience's abandonment of the church, his poetry has simultaneously insisted that remaining in the church is not equivalent to a journey's end. *Semyuief's* road to health in the inn will be long, and Will has far more yet to learn within an institution that is fraught with error and in the act of dissolution. Yet, for Langland and de Lubac, the church remains a necessary institution for pilgrims along a journey that has no earthly end:

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[544] De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church,* p. 203.

Her whole end is to show us Christ, lead us to him, and communicate his grace to us; to put it in a nutshell, she exists solely to put us into relation with him. She alone can do that, and it is a task she never completes; there will never come a moment, either in the life of the individual or in the life of the race, in which her role ought to come to an end or even could come to an end. If the world lost the Church, it would lose the Redemption too.[545]

'Yf thow wolt be wreke, wende into Vnite
And halde the there euere til Y sende for the.
And loke thow conne som craft ar how come thennes.'

'Consaileth me, Kynde,' quod Y, 'what craft be beste to lere?'

'Lerne to loue,' quod Kynde, 'and leef all othere.'

'How shal Y come to catel so, to clothe me and to fede?'

'And thow loue lelly, lacke shal the neure
Wede ne worldly mete while thy lif lasteth.'
And Y bi conseil of Kynde, comsed to rome
Thorw contricion and confessioun til Y cam to Vnite.[546]

[545] *Ibid*.
[546] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XXII.204-212, ['If you want revenge, make your way into Unity / And keep yourself there till I send for you, / And make sure you learn some craft before you come from there.' / 'Counsel me, Kind,' I said, 'what craft's best to learn?' / 'Learn to love,' said Kind, 'and forget all the rest.' / 'How shall I earn a living, to clothe and feed myself?' 'If you love loyally, you'll never lack / Clothes or earthly food as long as you live.' And according to Kind's advice I began to roam / Through Contrition and Confession till I came to Unity].

Conclusion

‘A Song in the Dark’

Langland presents a complex journey to his audience. Will, for example, exhibits a life through which learning to discern truth from falsehood does not take place through submission to the command of superiors, but rather through a constantly interrupted journey into the economy of salvation. The journey Langland sets out upon includes not only virtuous teachers, vicious tempters, erroneous clerks as well as virtuous yet

imperfect guides, but also Will's own conflicted self-understanding made manifest in his very clothing. Will is simultaneously dressed as a sheep, a wolf, a hermit, and a hypocrite. Characteristic of Langland's poetry, ideas are presented in both their noetic and material complexity to stress the particular ways in which form and content are inseparably bound together.

In *Piers Plowman*, all of these voices, internal and external, conflicting and correcting, play vital roles along Will's pilgrimage towards truth. *Piers Plowman* never depicts a clearly defined authority. Nor, does Langland represent a self that is stable enough to be trusted in the face of either an individual's own malformation in sin, or the examination of an institutional authority.[547] In this way, Langland's depiction of Will's pilgrimage is that of an unending journey that is guided neither by a superior, nor a self, but is instead only possible through an iterative journey in communion with a wildly diverse array of guides in a dialectic that perpetually reshapes and reforms a pilgrim.

At the same time, Langland's poem goes beyond its own subtle re-presentation of a self, life's diverse guides and the complex processes of grace. Langland's theological imagination applies the logic of Chalcedonian Christology to the church in order to demonstrate the way in which a pilgrim's journey necessarily includes the church because grace's healing transforms not merely the mind, nor individual human actions, but also the material and social elements of all human life. The nature of the church, at least as argued through some of the most authoritative voices in *Piers Plowman,* is to guide pilgrims into union with God through Christ by way of the stories and sacraments

[547] Will's exchange with Reason and Conscience in passus V is an explicit example of Langland representing precisely this kind of unknowing. A lack of self knowledge resulting from a fractile and conflicting understanding a one's self that leaves a person incapable of justifying their form of life in the face of ecclesial authority (V.6-104).

that sweep human life up into God's thereby binding the two as 'brethrene of o bloed.' Conscience's failure to found the church and the Eucharist upon the blood of Christ at the poem's end is so deeply poignant precisely because the Samaritan has shown Will, and the audience, that persistent reception of Christ's body and blood in the grange of the church is utterly necessary for salvation. While not realized in the poem, *Piers Plowman* has trained its audience in a character of hope so as to grieve Conscience's failure. This is a hope in a new creation enacted through the incarnation whereby God and humanity are made 'brethrene of o bloed.'

This is a vision, for Langland, that is social and spiritual, material and institutional. Creation is transformed and held together in the body and blood of Christ. While the poem's closing lines depict the unraveling of Vnity and Conscience's departure from it, Langland's catechesis has taught his audience to behold the church's fragmentation with great grief. Figures such as the Samaritan and the Christ who harrows hell re-present the salvific necessity of the church by depicting it as a focal point through which God's grace empowers pilgrims to participate in God's atoning and sanctifying work that transforms humanity through the narratives, and indeed the very body and blood, of Christ's reconciliation. This transformation will, Langland imagines, reshape the church and society into more just social and economic relations along the way towards the sanctification of the creation into union with God.

Seen in this light, Will's obedience to Kynde at the poem's end (an obedience to continue his pilgrimage within Vnity despite the darkness brought on by anti-christ's siege) can be regarded as an act of great courage. Will must learn to love within an institution and amongst figures who will constantly mishandle the sacraments and the

Scriptures, and also contort life-giving patterns of discipleship in the face of Mede's temptations. Will's submission to remain in such darkness and yet hope to learn, therein, how to love further emphasizes Langland's insistence concerning the unending nature of the Christian journey. The instability of the self and the corruptive potential of church and society, coupled with Langland's thoroughly social vision of grace and salvation, depict an ecclesiology that is as committed to the church's role in the Christian life as it is ruthless towards the potential for that very community to become a corrupting idol.

Langland's emphasis on the sacramental power of the church, even as he refuses to ignore the potential for the church to be usurped and manipulated in his own contemporary society, holds together Aquinas' view of a sacrament, and thus the church, as 'a holy thing that makes human beings holy'[548], with Augustine's view of love as recounted in the introduction:

> Then again charity itself, which binds people together with the knot of unity, would have no scope for pouring minds and hearts in together, as it were, and blending them with one another, if human beings were never to learn anything from each other.[549]

God might have chosen to heal humanity through means more firmly established against humanity's fragilities and vulnerability to corruption. Yet, God's decision to include human participation in the divine extension of grace – even to the point that God's inclusion of human agency entails the potential for human failure – is itself an act of

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[548] Aquinas, ST IIIa q.60.2.co, 'Respondeo dicendum quod signa dantur hominibus, quorum est per nota ad ignota pervenire. Et ideo proprie dicitur sacramentum quod est signum alicuius rei sacrae ad homines pertinentis, ut scilicet proprie dicatur sacramentum, secundum quod nunc de sacramentis loquimur, quod est signum rei sacrae inquantum est sanctificans homines.'

[549] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. Joseph Martin, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), prooem., linea 98, 'deinde ipsa caritas, quae sibi homines inuicem nodo unitatis adstringit, non haberet aditum refundendorum et quasi miscendorum sibimet animorum, si homines per homines nihil discerent', trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. in *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996) p. 103.

grace. This is because fallen humanity's fragile and imperfect participation in grace is the very means through which God invites God's creatures to participate in their own healing. The remedy must heal the wound. Therefore, healing is only possible when/if those same creatures participate in and are transformed through the bonds of charity that reweave all creation back into the very charity that is God. Learning, loving and healing go hand in hand.

If sin truly eviscerates a human soul and human society in the horrific ways that Langland images individually through the figure of Covetousness, and corporately through the social disintegration Covetousness' economy effects upon both church and realm alike, then the reconciliation of persons like *Semivuief* and Will, and communities like Vnity can only be possible when pilgrims participate in the social practices of retelling stories and the corporate performance of the sacraments that remember and re-enact those stories. As such, Langland's is a pedagogy that is genuinely instructive: there are mysteries that Will must be baptized into in order to 'pilgrim on'. And yet, Langland's poetry consistently functions in such a way as to identify and subvert ideologies as well as institutions manipulated to perpetuate such idols.[550]

The tension between conscience and the role of authority took on added strain in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and was only exacerbated by the ecclesial, social and political ruptures of plague, revolt and schism that followed.[551]

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[550] There is, I think, I kind of analogy between the ways in which the creeds offer the church a grammar for speaking about mysteries of the Christian faith, and the way Langland's poem offers a pedagogy for the Christian pilgrimage. For more on the ways in which the creeds function as a grammar in the Christian tradition, see John Henry Newman *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, & Co, 1909); George A. Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984).

[551] For examples of the ways in which William of Ockham and John Wyclif exacerbated this strain in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries see respectively Stephen Arthur McGrade *The Political Thought of William of Ockham: Personal and Institutional Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Langland's text responds to the urgent need for the rule of faith, passed down from generation to generation through a succession of formations that a person takes on under the tutelage of teachers within body of Christ, and yet simultaneously takes seriously the fragmentations that same body of Christ endures in the fourteenth-century England.

The various canons of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 reveal the Bishops' perception that some weaknesses harming the church's faithful in the early thirteenth century result from ignorance and poor education of the clergy. Canons insist on both the increase in trained teachers in cathedral schools and improvements to the education of ordinands, ordinands who would in turn educate the laity.[552] As Watson has pointed out, this zeal for religious education extended and passed down to the laity by way of a well-formed clergy took institutional form in England through the creation and practice of Pecham's Syllabus of 1281.[553] However, as Watson argues, in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the zeal for lay education in England cooled among members of the ecclesial hierarchy. The rise of vernacular theology in England, and in particular the rise of vernacular theology performed by John Wyclif and various Wycliffite groups, as well as works like *Piers Plowman,* led figures like Archbishop Arundel to constrict the 'licit' production and ownership of works of vernacular theology as well as lay preaching.

Press, 2002) and Michael Wilks *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000). For a recent analysis of the social and economic impacts of the Black Death in England in the fourteenth century see especially Alan Kissane's *Civic Community in Late Medieval Lincoln: Urban Society and Economy in the Age of the Black Death, 1289-1409* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017); on the Great Schism see especially Norman Housley's *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades 1305-1378* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Walter Ullmann's *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972), p. 279-305; on the Great Rising of 1381 see especially Rodney Hilton's *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381*, 2nd edit. (London: Routledge Press, 2003) and Steven Justice's *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); and on the Blackfriars Council of 1382 see especially Andrew Cole's *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[552] Norman Tanner *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Georgetown University Press, 1990) vol. 1 of 2, especially cannons 23 & 27, pp. 246-8.

[553] Watson, Nicholas 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitution of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), pp. 822-64.

Christian formation was certainly still encouraged by the ecclesial hierarchy, but the syllabus and training Arundel proscribed was shaped in the interests of stabilizing and building up the late medieval church in reaction against those voices like Wyclif and Ockham who questioned the church's wealth and power.[554] In a moment of intense social disruption, Arundel's *Constitutions* aimed to stabilize society and the church's power within it. Works like *Piers Plowman* and others can be seen as participating in a sort of literary sub-culture aimed to offer an ecclesial vision that often challenged the contemporary church even if it also sought to reform it.[555]

What does discipleship entail in *Piers Plowman,* and how does the poem envision a person to be properly formed in the rule of faith along the journey towards truth, and how is that vision distinct from the vision of Christian discipleship that emerges from Arundel's *Constitutions*? These questions are inseparable from the previous question, concerning how the rule of faith might be passed on in the midst of cultural and ecclesial fragmentation.

The rule of faith, for Langland, is not to be confused with a set of principles or propositional truth claims, nor is it hermetically sealed or finished. Rather, the rule of faith is represented in *Piers Plowman* as a dialectical practice, made up of an array of voices stretching across time, consistently at work retelling and re-enacting the narratives of God's salvation that crystalize in the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ. The rule of faith, like Langland's own work, is an unending dialectic carried out within the *corpus permixtum* of the church until Christ's return. As such, Langland's representation of a Christian pilgrimage affirms the role of the community and the

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[554] *Ibid.*
[555] David Aers *Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1980), especially chapters 1 & 2.

practices of the church as necessary for presenting Christ and communicating grace even as it problematizes the contemporary late medieval church's capacity so to do. This is exemplified, specifically, in the tension for Langland is bound up in the puzzle examined in detail in Chapter 1 concerning *how* the rule of faith is passed on through time. Specifically, the tension between Thomas Aquinas' commitment to a hierarchical pedagogy through which the Holy Spirit vivifies the church to enable the passing on of the *regula fides* across time, on the one hand, and the challenge that figures such as Chaucer's Pardoner and Langland's depiction of the church, clerks and religious orders pose to Aquinas' view.

However, Langland was not an anti-institutional thinker, nor did he imagine the Christian pilgrimage as possible without the sacraments and community that make up the body of Christ, the church. Quite the opposite, Langland's theological vision insists that God's gift of grace is thoroughly wrapped up in an ornate web of mediations that include the sacraments, scripture, the church, priests, and lay people which, if woven together in unity with faith, hope and love, and embodied in the narratives of salvation history, God then employs to heal sin sick persons and communities. However, Langland's commitment to such a rich tapestry of grace's mediations also drives him to rigorously consider the horrific ways in which those mediations can become fractured, inverted and torn apart due to the failures of sin. This is no abstract thought-experiment or poetic fiction, as has been seen, but the result of an imagination formed under immense intellectual and institutional pressures including the Black Death, the Great Schism, the Great Rising of 1381, and the Blackfriars Council of 1382.

Langland's unique capacity to speak into the contemporary tensions concerning the identity and practice of the church, both in terms of the poem's form and content, is a significant contribution to the development of doctrine in the late fourteenth century. Langland's representation of the church offers a unique ecclesial vision in the midst of a historical moment in which many were rethinking the shape of the church as well as the relationship between church and realm.[556] Henri de Lubac's *ressourcement*-formed ecclesiology offers a helpful lens through which to situate Langland in his late medieval context and amidst his patristic inheritances. Indeed, as explored in chapter 3, Langland's representation of the atonement, grace and the church deeply resonate with de Lubac's vision of the church as a 'translucent medium'. Langland's poetry trains its audience to reject theories of the atonement that might lead to either the reification of the institutional church (including overly mechanistic, and easily coopted, sacramental theologies), on the one hand, or the outright rejection of the church in favor of the judgment of the individual or groups of individuals outside the church, on the other. For Langland, the church is founded upon the blood of Christ. This foundation has implications for both the atonement and the communication of grace that pours forth from Christ's side to build up and also vivify a people formed by and taken up into Christ's own body.

Langland's poetry models a way for Christians to learn how to discern good and evil, truth and false, in a world in which the two are bound together in persons, institutions and ideas by seams that are often so subtle as to be invisible. Rather than stress absolute distinctions between, for example the elect and the reprobate, or human

[556] See for example Marsiglio of Padua *Writings on the Empire: Defensor minor and De translations Imperii* ed. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge University Press, 1993); William of Ockham '*A Letter to the Friars Minor' and other writings* ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade, John Kilcullen (Cambridge University Press, 1995), *John Wyclif: Selected Latin works in translation* (Manchester University Press, 2019).

and divine agency, Langland's poetry trains its audience to recognize the delicate and dialectical subtlety of such puzzles when read in light of the narratives of God's salvation. For Langland, the Christian journey is not grounded in the absolutes of elect and reprobate, but rather in Christ's passion and the iterative journey of being swept up into faith, hope and love as one learns and relearns to enact the narrative of God's salvation in and through the body of Christ. In this way, Langland makes a contribution to late medieval debates about the identity of the church and how Christians might discern the development of doctrine by offering a sort of *via media* between confidence in the church's benevolent hierarchical pedagogy, on the one hand, and confidence in the discernment of an individual (and specifically the theologian), on the other. Langland's poem offers its students a pedagogy, a formation, in the rule of faith through a form of poetry that models how the faith might be both examined and participated in, especially when the assertions of superiors either conflict with one's conscience or have proven themselves untrustworthy (for example, in the context of the Great Schism). Langland's poem offers its audience less of a 'light' in the dark, as if such a lantern might allow a pilgrim to discern between hard and fast categories of good and evil. Instead, *Piers Plowman* teaches its audience the narratives and figures whose lives animate the economy of salvation, and which give content to some of the core mysteries and practices of the Christian faith. As such, *Piers Plowman* instructs more like a hymn. It teaches its audience certain harmonies against the grain of dissonances. Its poetry informs and is informed by those harmonies, as its hearers are swept up into and learn to sing Langland's song in the dark.

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